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# SIX PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

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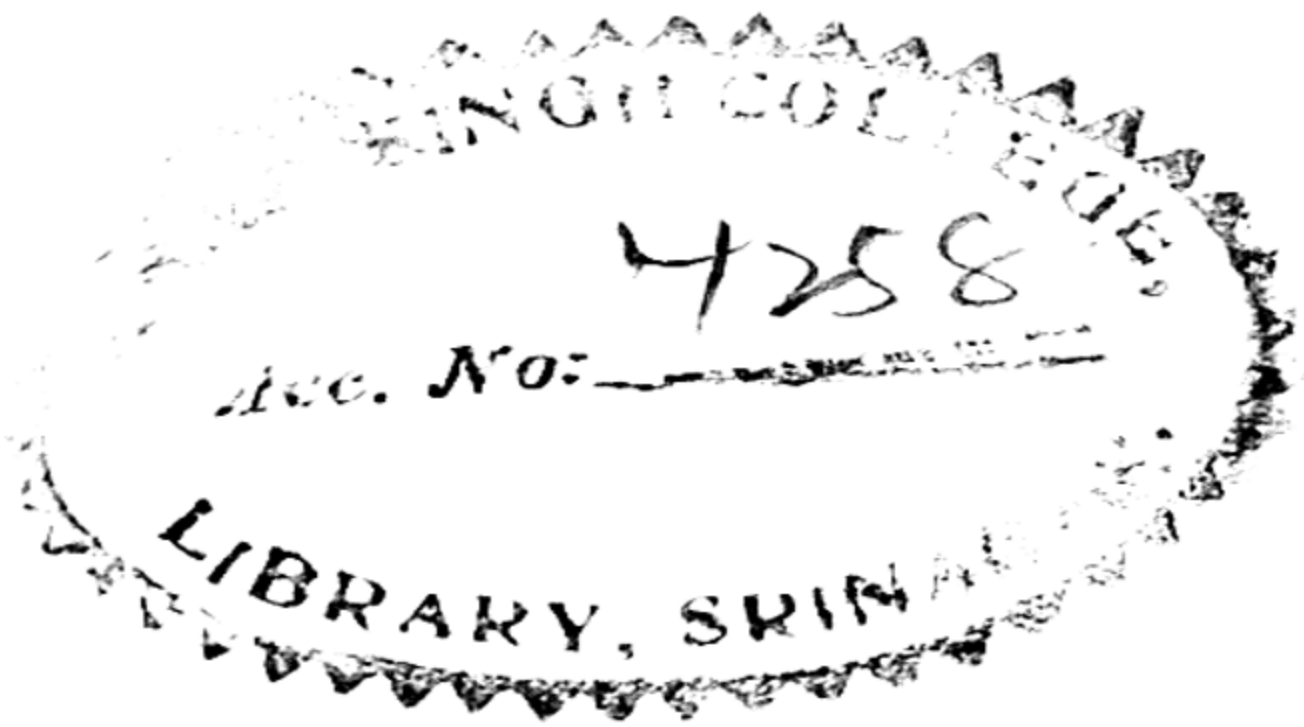
# SIX PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

By

ALAN D. MICKLE

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# PREFATORY NOTE

In the summer of 1923 the writer of this book visited London, hoping greatly to see, amongst other wonderful things, at least a few great plays. For a long time he was disappointed. He saw many plays, some quite good, some quite bad, many that were really neither good nor bad. There were, amongst others, Shaw plays, Galsworthy plays, Barrie plays. They were all well produced and well acted, and all interesting, exciting, stimulating, amusing, appealing. But the writer, with a head full of Shakespeare and Ibsen, refused to accept them as being great. He read an article by Galsworthy, wherein *R.U.R.* was hailed as a great play, so off he went, full of an almost excited expectancy, to see it. He found a cleverly-produced, exciting, imaginative melodrama – nothing more. Then a whisper came that there was a certain American actress appearing in London, whom one should certainly see. So off he went to find this actress, and found *Anna Christie*. The next day he read *The Hairy Ape*, and ever since has looked forward with hopeful anticipation to every new O'Neill play.

This little book is most certainly not an attempt

at a critical valuation of Eugene O'Neill's works. A hungry man does not attempt a critical valuation of a feast that is set before him – at least he does not until the feast is finished, and he is no longer hungry. Nor does the book pretend to be an exhaustive interpretation of the plays here dealt with. What a man will get out of those plays will depend entirely on what he can bring to them. A play, or a book, or a work of art of any kind, is not a mirror that reflects the experience-built-up inner being of everybody who looks into it, though a lot of people seem to have the idea that it should be. And, as Nina in *Strange Interlude* lived to find out, the people in this world of foremost importance to ourselves, are ourselves. If a work of art does not reflect our inner beings, it will be for one of two reasons. Either it will not bring enough to us, or we will not bring enough to it. And if it does not reflect our inner beings, it will bring no really great pleasure to us, and will not be a great work of art as far as we are concerned. Ibsen once wrote, 'Most critical faultfinding, when reduced to its essentials, simply amounts to reproach of the author because he is himself – thinks, feels, sees, and creates as himself, instead of seeing and creating in the way the critic would have done, had he been able.' This is very true, but the converse is true also. That is to say, if an author writes a book that is just as the reader would have written it, had he been able, then it will be

for that reader a great book. That is why O'Neill's plays are great plays for the writer of this book. They are just the sort of plays he would have written himself, had he been able.

This book, written in England, is simply, then, a testimony to the effect produced on a certain type of mind possessed by a certain wandering Australian by the reading of certain (for him) great plays written by a certain (for him) great American – that and the setting down of thoughts suggested by the reading. The writer, who through lack of opportunity has never even seen the majority of the plays written of performed on the stage, cannot claim for the book anything more.

A. D. M.

LONDON, *March* 1929.

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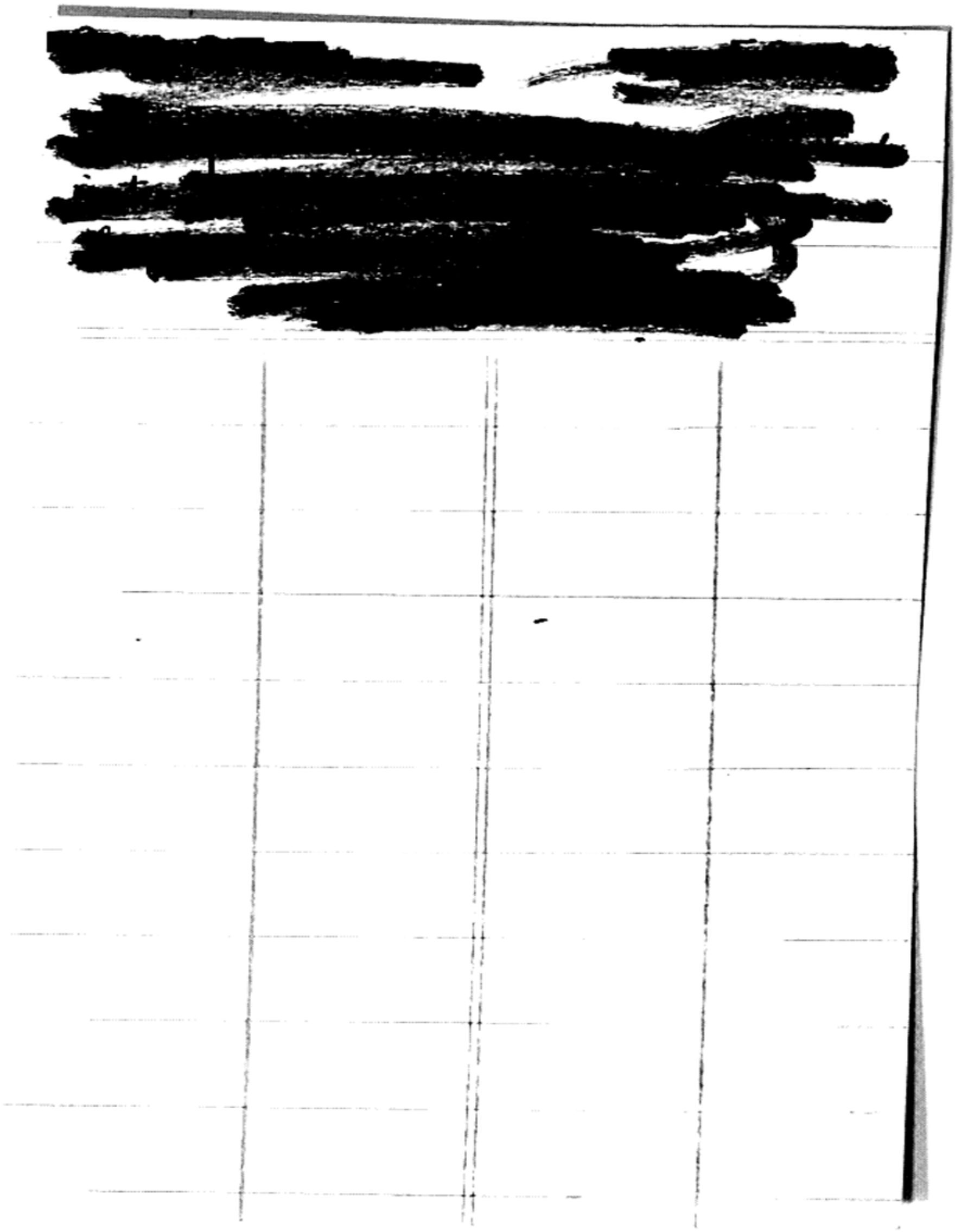
# SIX PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL



# ANNA CHRISTIE

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# ANNA CHRISTIE

## § 1

IN melodrama the hero fights against a human villain, and his puppets and machinations, and always wins the fight. In real drama the hero fights against Fate, and the puppets and machinations of Fate, and always loses. Yet real drama's function is always to exalt, never to depress. Probably there is in us a deep, instinctive awareness that every fight man wages against Fate, even though it ends disastrously for that man, is one more position gained in the great eternal battle that is ever being waged by mankind. This Fate would have man be, as are all the other animals, an acquiescent, contented slave; an accepting, resigned, unquestioning instrument to be employed in the fulfilment of Fate's ultimate purpose. But man has an instinctively perceived ultimate purpose too, and there is some within-force that urges him to eternal rebellion against the opposing and conflicting purpose of this Fate. And certain and sure that in the end Fate must win, he struggles desperately, all patiently, magnificently on. Billions of his kind will go down in the awful, never-ending conflict. It will not matter. Slowly

but surely gaining ground, generation after generation will throw itself with the same purposeful courage into the battle. Suffer each man must, and in the end die each man must; but can one man be shown suffering heroically and dying gloriously, then the showing will reflect the deep-down root-instinct that urges man to existence, and he will be hailed as man's representative and champion by man. This showing is the function of real drama. It must throw a strong light on some particular section of the field of man's eternal battle, and reveal to him in all detail a phase of the great fight. It must exalt and encourage man by showing him his representative, not as man sees himself and the people about him, feeble, cowardly, blind, purposeless entities, but as an essential part of a vast, patient, dauntless, unsubduable whole, that moves on fighting gloriously towards mankind's far-beyond sight and understanding, ultimate achievement. And real drama's method will be always one of contrast. It will make its hero suffer to show how he can endure suffering. It will make him weak to show him fighting against weakness. It will make him fear to show him fighting mankind's fight against fear. It will use ugliness to magnify beauty, weakness to glorify strength, darkness to intensify light. It will take man down to the utmost depths of life that the better might be illuminated for him – the heights.

§ 2

The greatest of all dramatists is Nature. Wonder in man is like a rocket, that soars up, flares into a great light, bursts into a thousand fading stars and, all-too-quickly, finds the night darkness again. But every now and then Nature, arranging circumstances, conceives a masterpiece that takes hold of the interest and imagination of man, fires his wonder, and holds it, burning like a star, sometimes even for the full nine days. She has a way of stressing the quite commonplace, touching it dramatically, and all in a moment it ceases to be commonplace and soars toward the sublime. One man dies. He is only one of the million who yearly so die. His passing is a pitiful struggle to draw a few more painful breaths. One of the million that, passing, awakens no wonder; he is buried, forgotten. But when a man dies as Lord Nelson died, in the very hour of his greatest victory; or as men died when the *Titanic* went down on her so tremendously trumpeted maiden voyage; or as Captains Scott and Oates died out on the Great Ice Desert, then the world sees not only the individual man engaged in his pitiful and hopeless struggle to keep life in him, but mankind engaged in its heroic and endless conflict with Fate's first minion, implacable, remorseless, insatiable Death. The passing away of these men is dramatised. They face the end with the eyes of the whole world

focused upon them. They reach the gateway to the Beyond moving in a great light. And sometimes Nature, again arranging circumstances, sets men to live out their lives in the light in which these men died. Then, though they still remain men, they cease to be individuals. We cease to see in them and about them, the sordid littlenesses that beset everyday life – the little aches and pains. They are lifted up to great heights, extracted as it were from the multitude to become epitomes of that multitude. They become – in a phase of man's everlasting war with Fate – representatives and champions of man.

§ 3

All the great human dramatists are merely copyists of the master-dramatist Nature's ways. The great Greeks were; Shakespeare was; Ibsen was; so in our own time, as he shows in his play *Anna Christie*, Eugene O'Neill is. Mentally, man is extremely short-sighted. He is strangely blind to what is ever before his eyes. The most sensitive and imaginative of us can only see a very little way before and behind. We are all more or less inclined to take it for granted that the immediate end is the ultimate end. But man does not live, though he all too often comes to believe that he does, merely for the achievement of his own little day-to-day affairs. He has a purpose far beyond any he knows. He does not eat food merely for the pleasure of eating. He eats food to

keep life in him. He keeps life in him – for what? He is, whatever he believes he is doing, playing his tiny part to bring about mankind's grand final achievement. And the dramatist's instinctive aim is to show man himself at work upon this colossal task. A man walks down the street to buy a pound of apples. That is his conscious purpose, but his conscious purpose is rooted in his instinctive purpose, and that instinctive purpose is connected with the ultimate root purpose of all. Nature decides that she will throw her light upon this man and reveal him, not as we see him every day, or as he sees himself, a complete living entity in himself, but as part of a vast, usually unilluminated, whole. Nature plans out the necessary circumstances and the drama opens. The man who went forth to face the daily domestic round is suddenly shown face to face with the tremendous, unconquerable, elemental forces against which is spent all the vital energy of man. The great human dramatists use exactly the same methods. A man goes by in the street. For us he is only one of ourselves. He is slightly stronger, slightly weaker, slightly more clever, but still he is one of ourselves. And he will remain so unless Nature or the great human dramatist has a set purpose for him. Perhaps Nature is just getting her great light ready to throw upon him. Possibly the great dramatic poet has already marked him down. We will suppose him a rather gloomy-looking man. We are rather contemp-

tuous of him because he is worrying over a task that we could easily do. He thinks too much; imagines too much; makes difficulties. Then a Shakespeare comes, conceives of a picturesque situation and surroundings, adjusts circumstances, as Nature does, to kindle a light, and throws the magnifying beams of this light on all the man's motives and movements. He becomes Hamlet. Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear; men with the qualities of all these men pass us by, talk with us, live with us, and we do not see anything greatly out of the ordinary in them. But Shakespeare, seeing them through his genius, sees all mankind in them, and, as it were, projects them and their life-adventures, greatly magnified, upon a screen. Nature does likewise. Captain Scott is just one of a thousand seafaring men to us, until Nature conceives her masterpiece, throws her magnifying light upon him, and shows all that is weakest, all that is strongest, all that is human, the man himself going down before the assaults of the minions of ever-watching, ever-waiting, and, in the end, always victorious, Fate.

§ 4

When we turn to a play like *Anna Christie*, we find the same rare quality that Shakespeare had, that Nature has. Here, apparently alone amongst living dramatists, is one who knows how to use Nature's methods, how to kindle and throw the great light.

Eugene O'Neill just picks out from a certain class a number of people. They are just as we all are, inherited temperaments and emotional beings, under cover of slightly differing anatomical appearance, moulded to differing individualities by the pressure of external circumstances. There are vast numbers of just such people in the world. The streets and houses of great cities teem with them. A little different they all are. Some are more passionate, some not so passionate. Some are more imaginative, some not so imaginative. Some are weaker, some stronger. But just as all the blades in a cornfield are approximately the same height, so these people, both inwardly and outwardly, are approximately alike. Then O'Neill arranges circumstances, kindles his light, and throws its strong beams on the certain number of them he has chosen, and, as it were, by contrast, settles about them a circle of darkness. In this circle they stand forth clear and distinct for all to see. We see them in their immediate environment, angry, happy, depressed, exalted, jealous, disillusioned, hoping, fearing, living out a phase of their lives. And we see something more. All the time of the play we are aware of a presence in the background, a vast, malignant, mocking, demoniac presence, against which all the actions of the people in the play make instinctive, unconscious war. In the end this Beyond-power will be victorious. All these people will have to give in and go the way it wills. Fate must win. When

*Anna Christie* was first produced in London, one of England's foremost dramatic critics spoke of the weakening of the play by its conventional ending, and thereby showed most convincingly that all that is really dramatic and poetical in the play had quite escaped his notice. For the ending of the play is really most unconventional. Certainly Anna and her romantic sea-given lover, after being apparently irrevocably separated, do come together at the end of the last act, and are on the morrow to be joined in matrimony. But that is not the end of the play. If it were, *Anna Christie* would not be the great play it is.

## § 5

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare personifies Fate's minions as the witches. He puts rags on them and hideous faces. He makes them horrible, grimacing, sinister things, and brings them on to the stage. They can see into the future, and however heroically man fights his fight, they only laugh mockingly. Their mistress is man's mistress too, and what she foretells must come to pass. They know they have only got to wait to see man fall. They have no time for his rebelliousness, no admiration for his courage, no pity for his suffering. To them he is merely foolish. But man has the Promethean fire in him. He has been granted little dream-glimpses of freedom. There is something that lures him on, something

that will not allow him to rest. He knows he must fail; he must die. He must obey as the witches obey, but he will only do so always rebelliously; he will always fight. The witches show Macbeth the future unrolled before him. They throw out for his consumption tragic hints and suggestions. But in spite of everything he hopes on, struggles on. Everything he sees advancing towards him as has been foretold. It does not matter. In the end he goes down before these advancing things with his sword in his hand and his harness on his back. And in Macbeth's fight, man sees his own fight symbolically told. He sees Macbeth, the weak man, the strong man, the cruel man, the kind man, the coward, the hero, fighting mankind's fight. The play is a saga of man.

§ 6

So is *Anna Christie* a saga of man. Here Fate's minion comes disguised as the sea. It ever hovers in the background as do the witches in *Macbeth*. It waits as a cat awaits a mouse that it knows cannot escape. It is never impatient, never anxious. It knows the future as the witches know it in *Macbeth*. It is to man and all his threats and entreaties just cynically, mockingly indifferent. It is luringly beautiful and terrifyingly sinister. To Anna, who loves it, it is beautiful. But old Chris, her father, hates and fears it. He has spent the greater part of his life

upon it, and it has never done him anything but harm. It has claimed as its victims at some time or other most of the members of his family, and he has a feeling that, in the end, it will get him too. But it will not get him without a fight. He takes a position as captain of a barge that never goes out into the open sea, and keeps his greatly loved little girl away inland so that she will be safe from it. Then he shakes his fist at it, and dares it to do its worst. One almost seems to hear the sea laughing. Man trying to circumvent the inevitable is only trying to circumvent himself. That is man's tragedy. Seeking to accomplish one end he invariably accomplishes another. That is because he believes that the end of his mental vision is the end of all. And it matters not the slightest whether man's motives be according to contemporary standards of morality, good or bad. In his battle with Fate, Macbeth fails because he has too much of the milk of human kindness in him. And Scott and Wilson and Bowers failed, not because of the conditions against them (terrible though those conditions were), but because, though they must have seen plainly the uselessness and hopelessness of it, they remained steadfastly loyal to their dying comrades. Other men might have done what reason told them to do, and leave these men and save themselves. And old Chris's love for his daughter, and his cunning planning to save her from the sea, are the direct causes of her coming back to it. She comes to the old man

and he takes her with him on the barge, and he is horrified to see almost at once appear indications in her of the serpent-like fascination the sea has always held over him and that he has always had to fight against. With Anna on the barge out in the bay in the night, events begin to move quickly. The 'old davil sea's' victims begin to come all of them more and more under its hypnotic spell. A dense fog has come up, and out of it comes a hail, and then a boat with a shipwrecked crew. One of the crew is the almost superhumanly strong Mat Burke – the sea's man. It had to be. Almost at once he loves Anna, and Anna, attracted by this tremendous, romantic, sea-given being, soon comes to love him. The only women he has hitherto known were those of the profession that was Anna's a short time before. He had always had a contempt for those women. There was always something foul and unclean about them. The only men Anna has hitherto known were the men who sought such women. She hated those men. And she was inclined to band all men with those she hated as he was all women with those he despised. But those were people of the country and the town. Now they come to each other as clean things from the clean sea. He has never met a woman like Anna, and she has never met a man like him. She is the thing his dreams have vaguely outlined, and he is that which her deep-down instincts felt there was somewhere, even when every new life experience told

those instincts they lied. But he is so clean to her that she cannot bring her past to besmirch such cleanliness. She must tell him of her past. At the end of the last act, their love for each other having overcome all that has threatened to part them, they come together, and are on the morrow to be married. But it has come about that Burke and old Chris have signed on to sail after the wedding on a long sea voyage on the same ship. There is no happy conventional ending here. Anna and her man drink, and try desperately to throw off the uneasy thoughts that have settled upon them, whilst old Chris opens the barge cabin door, and looks out into the night and a sea fog that has suddenly come up. When the final curtain falls he is standing there, lost in sombre preoccupation – shaking his head and muttering, 'Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see vhere you vas going, no. Only dat ole davil, sea – she knows,' while the two others stare at him, and from the harbour comes the mournful wail of the steamers' whistles. The play does not end on the stage at all. The end, you know, as well as Anna and Burke and old Chris know, is out there, where the sea waits.

§ 7

One of the most remarkable qualities about *Anna Christie* is its maturity. Before this play came O'Neill had written many one-act plays, and a few longer

ones. He had written *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, both of which are mature enough for anything. But in a way they were different. *The Emperor Jones* is of simpler and more direct continuity. It is like the speed-increasing rush of a narrowing river towards a mighty fall. At first the action is slow and easy, then the pace quickens and quickens as the culminating tragedy approaches, then there is the tragedy, then the action is slow and easy once more. There is only the one theme. It is the same with *The Hairy Ape*. But with *Anna Christie* there is the outer theme and an ever so cleverly interwoven inner theme. It is like two dramas in one. There is the part the characters play and there is the always suggested part that the sea plays. There is the play of the action and dialogue, and all the time is the play of the presence suggested by the action and dialogue. It is extraordinarily clear and clever. The two movements are in perfect unison and never seem to clash. O'Neill in this play seems to have just stepped into the breach left by the death of Ibsen. He begins where Ibsen ended. In his later plays Ibsen, whilst retaining his grip on realism, leaned more and more towards his own particular form of symbolism. In *The Master Builder*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *The Wild Duck*, to mention a few of his later plays, there is always a suggestion of the nearness of the mystery of the beyond sight and understanding. The characters under the spell of

and wholly influenced by the unknown tend to become almost psychic, and move like hypnotised beings. And the whole plays tend to become more and more symbolic of the Beyond-world, where the roots of human being are. With *Anna Christie* it is much like this. The characters, magnificently drawn, stand out clear and individual. They are grimly, remorselessly real. But they do not follow their own wills; they do not belong to themselves. Burke, the great-limbed, child-minded, boastful Irishman; Anna, the man-hating, life-embittered prostitute; kind-hearted, simple old Chris, are all only puppets of circumstance. And they all have in them the very natural human craving for dream-glimpsed other and better things. The play is tremendously ironic and magnificently dramatic. One can see so plainly every step that Anna was forced back by invisible forces until on that selected night she stood looking out from the barge into the fog. The past is unrolled and we see how it just had to be. It was inescapable. And Anna is as blind to what is coming as she was to what has come. All she knows is a sense of peace and restfulness that all through her cruel, hard life she has instinctively vainly sought. It is thus heavens come into being. But people never really enter these luring heavens. They are only as our own shadows that flee as we go after them, like rainbows that, however near they may appear to be, can never be really reached. All the acquired

instincts of a long line of seafaring ancestors seem to leap up in a sort of exultant recognition in Anna at this, her first contact with the sea. It comes to her as something strangely familiar. To her it is something new, clean, strong. It is all that all her life she has had to fight against is not. It is the beautiful that all her life all her instincts have craved. That is the grim irony of the play. She has found, at last, rest, peace, calm. But it is only the illusory calm that precedes the storm. Man does not light the torch for the torch's own use. Fate does not use man for man's own purpose. Fate did not drag Anna to the sea she wanted to come to to give her what she wanted. Fate takes up at that very moment when Anna has found everything old Chris's despairing, defiant call, and answers it with that hail out of the darkness. She pulls the strings and the puppets who only want to live their own lives as we all of us want to, dance, lie down, rise up again, suffer, enjoy, meet those they love and those they hate, as Fate wills.

§ 8

There is no doubt but what *Anna Christie* was born of the sea. It might justly be called a dramatic sea poem. We read that when he was quite a young man, O'Neill went to sea, and no man ever escapes from his youth. Youth is the intaking, impressionable age, and what can impress like the sea? The shadow and

grandeur of sea mystery is over all *Anna Christie*. One seems to hear the voice of the wind in it, and to see the boisterous play and the long curving sweep of the great grey waves. There is much running like music through it that is pure and clean and strong and fresh and beautiful like the sea against which O'Neill's young, impressionable self was set by circumstances. That sea must have greatly impressed him, and in the play he has greatly expressed it. The sea, like all the great things of Nature, reflects something that is deep in man, and he must personify it. It forces itself upon him. The mountains, the forest, the sunset, the storm, the calm, the river, the sea – man will find, at some time or other, all his moods reflected in all these. When a man worries he frowns. When he is deep in thought he appears disinterested. When he is angry he roars and rages. When he is happy he laughs and smiles. And when Nature in any great form frowns or appears disinterested, or roars and rages or laughs and smiles, then man takes these external symptoms as manifestations of inner being as they would be with him. So he gives life and purpose to it. So gods are born. The sea, to any man gifted with imagination at all, must live. For him it must express itself as he does. And he, reading that expression in his own terms, finds something tremendously purposed, something that has strange, vague monsters swimming in its depths, as his own thoughts swim in his mind, some-

thing that, read from outward indications, has moods of fierce rebellious anger, and moods of lazy amiability. It is like a vast, beautiful, lithe, swift, powerful, wild animal that basks full-fed and contented in the sun, or bares its fangs and claws and roars in terrible anger. And always it is, as far as man is concerned, unapproachable and always indifferent to his entreaty or threat. Against its vast majesty and strength and mysteriousness man shrinks into individual insignificance. But the imagination that conceives of the grandeur of Nature conceives also of the glory of mankind. The greater the enemy the more heroic becomes that which will not surrender to it. And mankind goes down in hordes but does not surrender. Anna sees only the beauty of this wild animal, the sea, and old Chris, who has felt its cruelty, sees only its cunning trickery and its hidden fangs and claws. He hates and fears it. But, simple old man as he is, seeing himself beaten at the end of his life-long fight with it, he goes down with his colours flying. This representative of man is still victorious even in defeat. He signs on to go to sea, thinking that if he gives himself up as a sacrifice to it, it might allow his beloved Anna to go in peace. There is something very magnificent in the utter simplicity of this belief and motive. The man is ready to suffer and die that mankind may live. Fate wins another battle, but at a price, and the endless war only enters another phase. Mankind still fights on.

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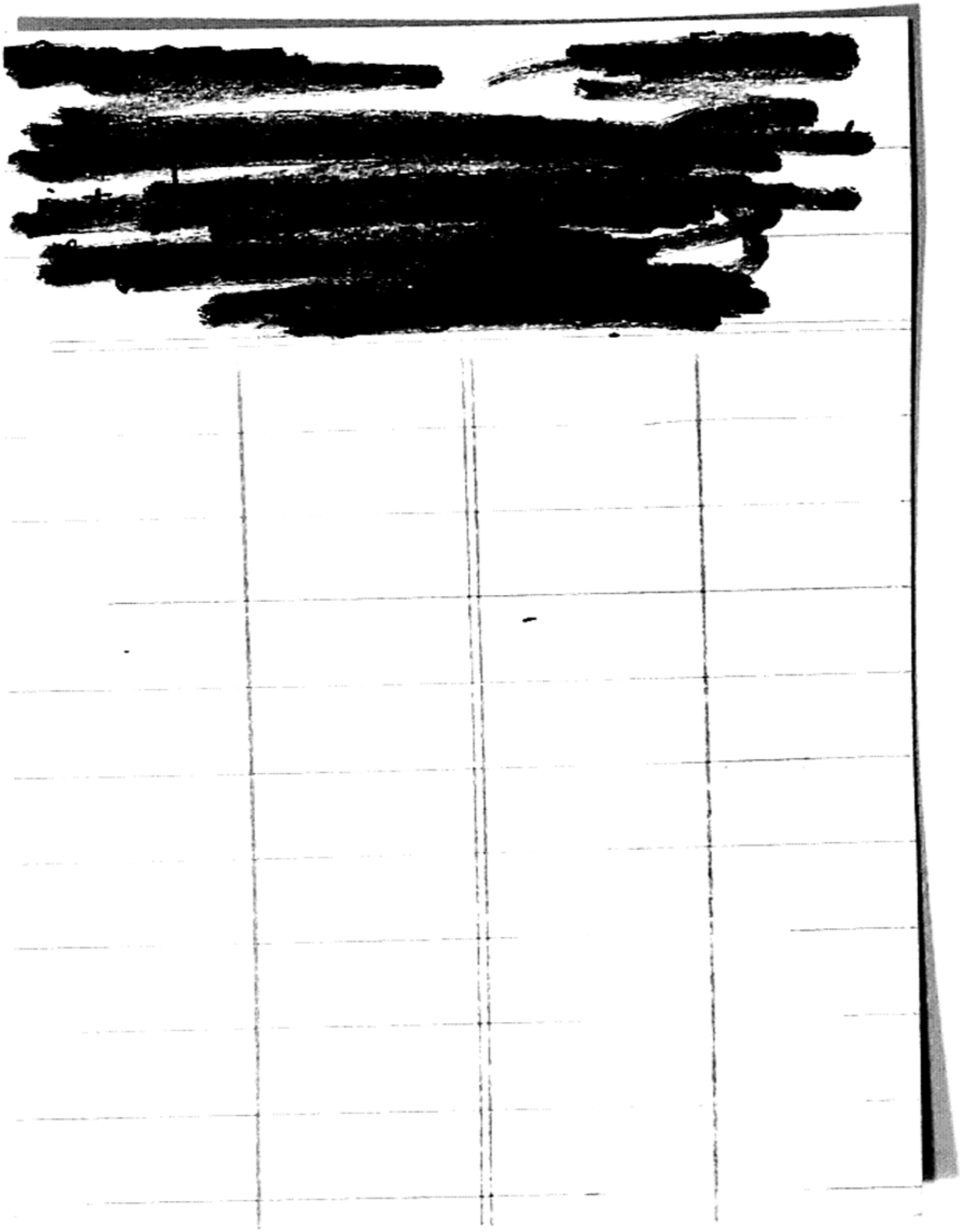
# THE HAIRY APE



# THE HAIRY APE

## § 1

IT was William Blake who once wrote somewhere words to the effect that man is nearer to God on the mountains than in the great cities. To turn from the cultured, polished faithfulness of Galsworthy's plays, or the passionless brilliancy of Shaw's, or the pleasing, sentimental romanticism of Barrie's, to a play like Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, is like stepping out from the more or less standardised civilisation of the great cities, where one is walled off from most that is natural by one's fellow-man and his inventions, to the wilderness, where one is at once alone with primitive, brutal, wonderful, awe-inspiring, naked Nature, and only veiled thinly from that which naked Nature always profoundly suggests. This is a great-city age, and as all great, prosperous, quick-moving ages are, a surface age. One to keep pace with the times must live on the surface. One cannot move quickly in the depths. We human beings are like flowers that grow on the one bush. Down at the root of the bush is the meeting-place of us all, the common soul, the universal mind. And down towards that root we must struggle and worm

our way, would we bring to our surface-lives, our bloom-shapes, the matter common to us all. And we all would bring up and give forth this common matter. We would all understand and make ourselves understood. That is the instinctive aim of all of us. It is God's call to us and His order to us. But the urge to this ultimate universal expression and understanding varies in force and persistency according to our differing selves and the different ages in which we live. There are ages that are instinctively expressive, and ages that are instinctively repressive – giving ages and conserving ages. When spring comes the whole life-urge of the plant is surface-wards. All must be directed towards the blossoming. The root is forgotten. Every cell quickens its movements and dances joyfully towards the perfecting of the flower. But when winter comes the plant's life-urge turns from the flower towards the root. Now comes the taking, conserving age, the repressive age. The flower must be sacrificed, growth must be suspended, life must be maintained. Now the root is all. The human race seems to move in just such cycles. There is the dark root age, the golden age of the budding and flowering, the red age of the blowing and withering. The red age, like the fiery glow of sunset that foretells night, foretells the coming of another dark age to the world. The golden age is the giving, spending age. It gives and spends until civilisation becomes dangerously bloodless, and fear

of extinction turns the instincts towards preservation by conservation. Then comes the dark root age. The golden age is all for the individual, and in it means of expression multiply and multiply. In it men become like flowers in a garden on an early sunny summer's day. Those flowers, stretching as far away from their roots as they can, give out as generously and extravagantly as they can their best colours, their finest perfumes. Their life-struggle is to give and win the satisfaction of having their gifts accepted. The garden as the result of their endeavours becomes rich and radiant. It is like that with man's golden age. It is always an outward-looking age. It is always for onward and upward movement. Actively surface expressive it is improvident, and wont to be forgetful of the depths. The dark age that is born of it is an individual-repressing age. In it the race instinct for the future good of the race is ready to sacrifice the individual as the plant is ready to sacrifice the flower when winter comes. This age of ours is a golden age. So was the Elizabethan Age. And a literature always reflects its age. Its outward expression is reflected in its many popular writers; the inner forces that move it to that expression are reflected in the works of its few great writers. The mighty force that drove the Elizabethans finds glorious expression in the works of Shakespeare, but the surface expression it drove them to is more clearly reflected in the works of the

lesser Elizabethan writers. And those surface chroniclers were often more popular in their day than Shakespeare was. For a similar reason, I think, the works of Eugene O'Neill are never likely in this age to be quite so popular as are those of the three playwrights mentioned above. Galsworthy, Shaw, Barrie, brilliantly clever as they are, are surface writers. They are all three of them splendidly intellectual; they all look with keen sight at the world about them, and all set down, in their various ways, truthfully what they see. They look, too, from all sorts of new and strange angles, and what they set down comes to us as something strange, exciting, pleasing, stimulating, always appealing. But they deal almost wholly with what is impermanent and passing, and not with the under, unseen vastness on which all these things are based. They look at things, which is never necessarily looking into and through and beyond things. They are three faithful chroniclers of the active, multi-coloured, outward expression of the age in which they live; but O'Neill is more – as Shakespeare was to his age, a poet chronicler of its inward forces.

§ 2

Shaw shows up the pretentiousness and fetish-worshipping, self-blind stupidity of the average present-day academic professional man. He makes us laugh at him and his beliefs. He attacks con-

ventions, fashions, customs, accepted philosophies, accepted religious beliefs, social institutions. He shows these things from all sorts of angles. He reverses them, and shows you them from the reverse side. He stands them upside down, and shows you them as you are unaccustomed to see them, that is upside down. He shocks you, grips your attention, in the end makes you laugh at these things. So he puts a new value on them. And supplying a demand, and thereby reflecting a demand, he chronicles man's present-day state of common evolutionary mental development. In a different way in his own time Herbert Spencer did the same thing. But this state of common mental development is always changing. And all the other things Shaw attacks are always changing. They are merely the superficial coverings for the depths of human nature and come and go in fashions as do the clothes men wear. Shaw writes humorous plays but never gives the world a Falstaff. And he never touches the great basic emotions that are neither local nor impermanent. He does not write dramas of fear, or jealousy, or hate, or love, or intellectual loneliness. He has never given the world any great mental tragedy, and all the great tragedies of the world are mental tragedies. And no art-work that did not deal with the great root emotions and passions has ever yet endured.

§ 3

Galsworthy and Barrie differ vastly from Shaw, but again we have in them historians of their age's external expression. They do not give what is representative of human nature, regardless of all time or place. All Galsworthy's characters, faithfully and beautifully drawn as they are, are only symbolical representations and reflections of the external expression of the age in which they live. Take away from any of his characters the impression of this external expression, the result of the pressure of the age's conventions, customs, fashions, habits, institutions, beliefs: and what remains? They are all wholly shaped and moulded by their times, and their comedies and tragedies all serve to show the social virtues or the social evils of those times. It is the same with Barrie. He is always pleasingly, comfortingly humorous. And he makes a vast appeal to that romantic, sentimental side that practically all of us have. But that side is no deeper than the excitement-craving side that we practically all have too. They are both superficial, reflecting sides that cover the deeps of human nature where all the roots of our beings are. Barrie's plays, like Shaw's and Galsworthy's, are easily read, easily understood. It is not necessary to bring any real root-experience to them. All that is interesting, arresting, appealing, beautiful in them is in their surface plots and characters. It is

never so with O'Neill's plays. Their great beauty is always in their depths, and their surface plots and characters, in themselves often ugly and repellent, are only indicators and suggesters of that always underflowing beauty. And one must bring much to them. People used to Galsworthy and Barrie and Shaw might easily be repelled at first sight, at least, by O'Neill. One is brought by him up against such uncompromising speculation, such stark introspection, such elemental emotion. These qualities Shaw never really touches, and Galsworthy and Barrie in the main only rather fearfully play round and suggest. But they did not get their example for so doing from Shakespeare. Speculation, introspection, elemental emotion are the forces that move or retard, and always put fire and life into all the great characters of all his great plays. *The Hairy Ape* is full of introspection and speculation, and it is almost brutally emotional. So was *Macbeth*. In *The Hairy Ape* is intellect, which the English playwrights have got in full measure, and the elemental emotion that they seem to be afraid of, and a sense of the tragically grand that they do not seem to have any idea of at all.

## § 4

The key to *The Hairy Ape* is Rodin's vastly suggestive piece of statuary, *Le Penseur*. No man, as long as he could satisfy his desires by action, ever

thought in this world. Thought is only man's last resource. It is only brought into play when action will no longer suffice. The thinker came into the world ages after the doer. Now at opposite extremes of humanity stand representatives of these two – thinkers and doers – introverts and extroverts as the modern psychologists have named them. No man is entirely introvert and no man is entirely extrovert; but all men lean towards one or the other. *Le Penseur* depicts the extrovert becoming introvert. He is man waking into consciousness of his life position, bringing himself into perspective. And his eyes opening into the light, blink, suffer. Transition stages are always painful, and always necessary. The first man to see must burn as Prometheus burned, but he must see. Whilst a man can sufficiently express himself in action, he will not look into himself or wonder at himself. But when his desires become so great that he cannot repress them, and cannot express them in action, then the man must be ever more and more unhappy until he can find some new mode of expression to take the place of the hitherto quite-satisfying, instinctive action. *Le Penseur* is unhappy because he has fierce desires within that he cannot find expression for. Once those great limbs of his were sufficient to win expression for all his desires. Then he could satisfy himself, be contented with his position. He could accept. But it is no longer so. He has come up against something

that renders all his great physical being useless. There has awakened in him an awareness that there is something more in life than food and women. There is a baffling feeling that will not allow him to rest satisfied with life from birth to death as merely a pursuit of life-maintenance and life-continuation, and nothing more. The beast is becoming man. And his great desires, failing to find expression where they used to, turn now in other directions. He would think, but he cannot yet do so. He has not yet the necessary command of words. His looking within is as yet only a blind, instinct-directed groping for something, he knows not what. His mind's eye has not yet accustomed itself to the darkness. *Le Penseur* is primitive man, all swiftness and courage and cunning and great physical strength. He is the boldest, cleverest, hardiest, most ambitious of all the animals. And he is for the first time feeling the desire within, that will not be stilled by any physical fulfilment. It is the first waking of mental longings. These longings crave expression in a new form that cannot yet be attained. The result is irritability, never-dying discontent, confusion, anger, puzzlement, inevitable loneliness. He is ceasing to be what all his kind yet are. He has something they have not, wherefore he must be away from them and apart. He must know the loneliness the one-eyed king of the blind would know. Hitherto-relied-on action now failing him, he cannot find the means to give

expression to that new force that gnaws within. And it is something he must give to his fellow-men. It is like the fire that gnawed at the vitals of Prometheus in the old legend. *Le Penseur* is only a modern version of that old legend. *The Hairy Ape* is only a still more modern version of *Le Penseur*.

§ 5

Yank, the hero of *The Hairy Ape*, is tremendous. He is a stoker on an Atlantic liner and a giant physical being, wedded to great character force, has given him a position of eminence. He is a sort of king of the primitives. The other stokers dwell on his words, jump at his orders. They fear him, to a certain extent envy him. He is assured, confident, exultantly strong as a lion in the wilderness is, and the stokehold is his world as the wilderness is the lion's. He is all vast physical strength, and he believes that he and his kind are the necessary energy that goes into and puts life and power into steel and gold. Hear him. Paddy, the sentimental, whisky-sodden Irishman, has just been waxing eloquent on sailing-ships and their times. But Yank will have none of such talk. All that Paddy has to say of far-off nights and days, of stars and moons, of suns and winds and fresh air and the rest of it, for Yank is 'crazy tripe.' He is steel and strength and speed. He is part of the engines. 'Why de hell not! Dey move, don't dey?

Dey're speed, ain't dey? Dey smash trou, don't dey? Twenty-five knots a' hour! Dat's goin' some! Dat new stuff! Dat belongs! But him, he's too old. . . . He can't breathe and swallow coal-dust, but I kin, see? Dat's fresh air for me! Dat's food for me! I'm new, get me? Hell in de stokehole? Sure! It takes a man to work in hell. Hell, sure, dat's my fav'rite climate. I eat it up! I git fat on it! It's me makes it hot! It's me makes it roar! It's me makes it move! . . . Everyting else dat makes de woild move, somep'n makes it move. It can't move wit'out somep'n else, see? Den yuh get down to me. I'm at de bottom, get me? Dere aint nothin' foither. I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild moves! It – dats me! – de new moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel – steel – steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it!' Like the giant ape thumping its chest in increasing exultance he roars his challenge. What are the puny-muscled first-cabin people, and the officers and the owners of the ship, compared with him! Could they exist in his domain? Dare they enter his kingdom? Forcing his meaning through his all inadequate words he gives his fellow-primitives his

crude, self-assertive, self-glorifying life-philosophy. He feels confident, secure. He sings with the animal joy of being magnificently alive and expressive as he translates the fierce life-impulses in him into terrific bursts of physical energy. Like the giant ape that is free and untamed and magnificent in its wild jungle, and does not know of the existence of other worlds, so he in his world is free and untamed and magnificent. And then suddenly all changes. Fate accepts the proud, far-flung challenge; the white-dressed, white-faced woman enters the stokehold; the trap-door closes. Yank is man in the beginning. This woman is woman at the end. She is everything that Yank is not. 'I'm afraid I have neither vitality nor integrity,' she cries; 'all that was burnt out in our stock before I was born. Grandfather's blast furnaces flaming to the sky melting steel, making millions – then father keeping those home-fires burning, making more millions – and little me at the tail end of it all. I'm a waste product in the Bessemer process – like the millions. Or rather, I inherit the acquired trait of the by-product, wealth, but none of the energy, none of the strength of the steel that made it.' She is the expression not of her stock's life-energy, but 'merely of the artificialities that energy has won for itself in the spending.' Bored and seeking distraction, she goes down into the stokehold and faints in fear at sight of the fierce 'abysmal brutality, naked and unashamed,' of Yank. And the sight of her adminis-

ters as great a shock to him as the sight of him does to her. She comes to him as a being from another world. When he learns that her fear of him is born, not of any recognition of superiority in him, but of repulsion and disgust; when he learns that he is to her only a dangerous animal, a 'hairy ape,' then his life-philosophy bursts like a bubble. The bottom he once felt so secure on slips from under his feet. He sees in an instant the hitherto unseen cage he and his kind are in, and its bars. He has glimpsed liberty and found thereby the prisoner he is. Henceforward, whenever he sits down it is, according to the stage directions, in the fiercely pathetic attitude of *Le Penseur*. Something has been awakened within that the most terrific action he, with all his giant physical being, is capable of will not express.

§ 6

There are two clearly-outlined characters in Yank's community of primitives who serve to illuminate the character of Yank. The one is the little, wizened-up, monkey-like Irishman, Paddy. He might be called the poet of the community. The other is the cockney, Long, who might be called the community's politician. They have both got the gift of words that Yank lacks, but neither Paddy's sentimentalism nor Long's bombastic political talks will help him to express this something that has wakened within. It

is something beyond their understanding, yet something that will never more allow him to rest until it is expressed. Paddy hints that the change wrought on Yank by the sight of the woman is due to love. But Yank knows it is more like hate. Long hints that it is awakening class-hatred in Yank. But Yank knows it is not class-hatred. It is something vastly more. It is something that has taken away his life-belief and left him with nothing to cling to. It has isolated him from his kind. 'Cut out an hour offen de job a day and make me happy!' he cries bitterly. 'Gimme a dollar more a day and make me happy! T'ree square a day, and cauliflowers in de front yard – ekal rights – a woman and kids – a lousey vote – and I'm all fixed for Jesus, huh? Aw, hell! What does dat get yuh? Dis ting's in your inside, but it ain't your belly. Feedin' your face – sinkers and coffee – dat don't touch it. It's way down – at de bottom. Yuh can't grab it, and yuh can't stop it. It moves and everyting moves. It stops and de whole woild stops. Dat's me now – I don't tick, see? – I'm a busted Ingersoll, dat's what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me. Aw, hell! I can't see – it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong!' Once he could tell people everything he wanted by action. His limbs and body were all expressive. Now with this new thing to be expressed he pathetically still tries the old method and finds its impotence. And the new method is not

yet become sufficiently perfected to be of any use. He cannot yet think. In a powerful fantastic scene Yank attacks the society people returning from church. Desperately clinging to his old methods he tries to force his meaning upon them, but they move by indifferent, disinterested. They cannot even be made aware he is there. They neither see nor hear him. He is utterly powerless against them. He 'does not belong' in their world. Then he goes to jail and talks with his fellow-prisoners; he goes to the office of the I.W.W. It is always the same. They give him politics, law, God. But none of these will suffice. He sees what they do not want to see, what they cannot be made to see. Calling him an ape has awakened him to the fact that he is a caged man. He tries to point out the bars of the cage he has discovered he and his kind live in, and they talk as Paddy talked, as Long talked. They laugh at him, or join together and turn on him in fear. Yank moves on; he does not 'belong' with any of them.

§ 7

The last scene of the play is wild and fantastic, but there is a tremendous pathos in it, and always a sense of exalting grandeur. Reading this scene, one recalls the novels of Victor Hugo. There is the grimly heroic. There are the heights and the depths, and the sublime that would, in any but a great artist's

hands, be ridiculous. One also thinks of *Moby Dick* and the gigantic harpooner, defiant of Fate to the last, nailing the colour to the sinking masthead of the ship. Yank, 'belonging nowhere,' has been called a hairy ape. Very well, he will go to the apes; perhaps they will understand. He goes to the Zoological Gardens and speaks to the apes. He tells them they are better off than he is, because they are at the bottom, as he used to be who is now neither on earth nor in heaven. They are complete apes, but he is not an ape, and he is not yet complete man. He belongs nowhere. He says to the gorilla: 'Sure, you're de best off! Yuh can't tink, can yuh? Yuh can't talk neider. But I can make a bluff at talkin' and tinkin' – a'most git away wit' it – a'most! – and dat's where de joker comes in.' Yank finds he cannot make himself understood, and is not wanted, even by the apes. He is 'Le Penseur,' and 'Le Penseur' is the unwanted of both gods and men. Prometheus stole fire from the gods to give warmth and comfort to man, who did not know there was such a thing as fire. And the gods were wroth and punished him. And man, who had not asked for fire, was not grateful. When he saw the use of the fire he accepted it and used it, and forgot who had given it to him, who was forced to steal it for him. Man is always like that. The thinker is a disturber always, and the gods do not want to have mankind disturbed any more than mankind wants to be disturbed. In the

end Yank opens the gorilla's cage and talks at the gorilla, until it comes forth, goaded to anger, as everybody Yank has tried to explain himself to has been goaded to anger, and takes him in its arms, crushes him, and throws him into the cage. So he dies as he has lived, strong, brave, defiant – and in a cage. He has learnt what every forerunner has always to learn: that the majority accepts what it does not understand, gets a certain amount of happiness from its acceptance, and that no man is so little understood and so much misunderstood as the man who cannot accept, and strives, because he must, to understand. Those who are born in prison, and live all their days prisoners, do not know that they are prisoners. It is the man who gets the first glimpse of liberty who knows first what imprisonment means. The thinker is the disturber, and to any age and to any social class that Fate happens to place him in, 'he does not belong.'

§ 8

*The Hairy Ape* makes a fine companion play for O'Neill's earlier great one-act play, *The Emperor Jones*. In both these plays his early-matured, magnificently rich imagination soars in easy-moving, swift, star-touching flights, without ever once losing sight of the earth. For all the fantasy and symbolism in them, they are splendidly real. Both

the backgrounds of the plays and all the characters are drawn in clear, clean, sharp lines. This is one of the things that are so splendidly unique about O'Neill. His talent is so many-sided. He has travelled so much and observed so keenly that there is nothing local or time-limited about anything he does. He has picked out the queerest and most picturesque people and jotted them down on the tablets of his mind for future use. It is the same with his scenes. He has travelled the world collecting backgrounds for his plays. And he has a real Shakespearean gift of character and background selection. He has the sombre, subduing greyness of the vast cities and the glaring richness of tropical colours at his call. He has equatorial seas and islands and forests, and he knows the past as the present. Then he has the gift of impregnating his backgrounds with never-obtruding but never-absent suggestiveness. The fog in *Anna Christie* becomes a mask worn by a living, sinister presence. So does the forest in *The Emperor Jones*. So are the cage-like forecastle of the ship and the hell-like stokehold in *The Hairy Ape*. In both *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones* there is the grimmest, most uncompromising, stark realism. But there is always something more. The characters never lose touch with the real, but are never out of touch with the beyond-real. On both Yank and Jones there is an oppressive, ever-goading something that they can neither explain nor shake off. Yank

and Jones are both giant men, with much of the picturesque, untamed savage still in them. The earth of their birth is still thick upon them. Jones, for all his outward manifestations and indications of white man's civilisation, is still the superstitious African negro at heart, and Yank still has the hairs of the ape on him. Yet Jones on his crimson throne, in his glaring, white-walled palace, and Yank in the gloom of the furnace-lit stokehold, both at once pathetically comical and tragical, are heroically-dimensioned and all-outstanding. The murderer and the wild ape-man are still mankind's champions in his everlasting war with Fate. But their ways and parts are vastly different; they are almost direct antitheses. Jones' assumed veneer of white-man's civilisation makes him Emperor, but when that veneer is rubbed off, with his gaudy uniform, by the forest, he is shown to be just one of his own kind. But Yank, using the same uncouth lanugage, doing the same repellent work, living in the same surroundings on equal terms with and in the same social class, is never one of his kind. It is something that comes from without that gives Jones leadership of his kind, but it is something that comes from within that makes Yank a leader of his. Jones is a slave of the dead, Yank is a slave of the unborn. Jones flees from and in the end is overtaken by the past, and Yank falls exhausted, failing to catch up with the future. Jones dies pursued by dreams, and Yank dies pursuing

dreams. It is the voices of the past that madden Jones, and the voices of the future that torment Yank. Smithers, that lowest type of white civilisation, can see into and through and round what terrifies Jones, can comprehend it and laugh at it. But Yank's fellow-men cannot see or understand at all what it is that compels Yank. Jones belongs to his kind, but Yank never belongs to his. In *Anna Christie* Fate is ever present, disguised as the sea. In *The Emperor Jones* she is present as those maddening, pulsating, never-ceasing, ever-nearing drums. And in *The Hairy Ape* she, in that single dramatic instant in the stokehold, leaps at Yank and, as an ever-present, tormenting, invisible, never-get-at-able force, follows him until he dies.

## § 9

*The Hairy Ape* is a tragically grand play, and the tragically grand is not for everyone. It was Nietzsche who wrote that in order to live joyously a man must live dangerously. Primitive man had to live dangerously. In this aggressively expressive golden age of ours there are still many with the primitive instinct to seek the joys of the dangerous life alive and strong in them. But there are vastly more in whom generations of civilisation have repressed this flaming instinct until it is no more than an enfeebled spark. These people can only know the joys of dangerous living vicariously, and they make up the main section

of the fiction-reading and theatre-going public. They are mainly of the ultra-refined, leisured class. And they go to their vicarious adventures as children go to the Zoo. Those children know that the lions and tigers and wolves and bears can never get out of their cages, so they can get their thrill in safety. And the people written of above must get their thrill in safety. The real must be romanticised and sentimentalised until it is as remote as the animals are from the children at the Zoo. It must just gently stir and soothe the surface, not disturb the emotional depths. For such people a play like *The Hairy Ape* will not be romanticised or sentimentalised enough; it will be too nakedly real. It will be too emotionally disturbing; its raw brutality will be all too near and menacing and fearful. It will be like to knock the magic spectacles through which these people see only what they want to see off their noses. For such people the depths are not. But it is only from the depths that one can realise the heights. Heaven was conceived in hell. It was not the people who feared to look at the sun who found out that God was beyond it. And people cannot know much of flowers who do not know the roots of the plant. One must be able to look calmly on the Yanks of life to realise what they represent. Going deep into life one leaves behind the pettily soothing and pretty. All the beauty of that is burnt pale in the beauty of the tragically grand as a match burns in the light of the sun.

§ 10

Deep down near the roots life is extraordinarily optimistic. On the surface man is pessimistic and fearful. And the more conscious he becomes the more pessimistic and fearful he becomes. As soon as ever he starts to think he becomes a sceptic and questioner. He cannot help being so. On the surface he has little lasting belief and little faith. Everything, to his undeveloped conscious sight, is too changing and confusing. But deep down, where his great root-instincts are, he is all faith. Every great teacher teaches him the same lesson: Life is illusion, futile, never worth while, its pains are more than its joys; Death, some of them have even averred, is better than Life. But what notice does man in the depths of him really take of such teachers? He listens to them, understands their words, agrees with them, and still lives on. And though the life-enthusiasm of the individual man may wane, that of mankind does not. In spite of all experience and all reason and logic, every new generation comes on just as enthusiastic, just as faith-filled, just as optimistic, just as eager as the flower is, when the warmth of spring comes, to burst into life. And even the teachers, when they are being most pessimistic, cannot hide their joy in being alive and their faith in the very life their words disparage. Their pain, disillusionment, disappointment, their pessimism, is as the pain of

the burning of the torch that lightens the darkness. They put their pessimism into words and the arrangement of the words gives them another and far profounder meaning. There is something in the harmonic flow of the sentence that reflects the joy that comes out of creating the flow. It is the joy of the expression of the very suffering the words bemoan. Let us listen to the 'Miserere' from *Il Trovatore*. The composer has put into it the deepest sorrow he has ever experienced, but we, listening, are exalted. Let us read Macbeth's speech that begins: 'She should have died hereafter, then would have been a time for such a word. . . .' Here is set down a complete, utterly pessimistic summing-up of life. But if the word-meaning depresses us, the music of the word-arrangement exalts us, and we are left higher than we were. The art of a day is then for the people of the day – the people whose imagination is too feeble-winged to soar with assurance into yesterday and to-morrow; the people for whom the word is the word and nothing more. For such people Eugene O'Neill's plays are not. If they cannot face the depths he takes them into, then not for them are the heights he reveals. But if the optimism that is the very source of life is strong and full in one's being, one will find much of what is deeply joy-giving and beautifying in oneself reflected in the tragic, poetic grandeur of a play like *The Hairy Ape*.

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# THE GREAT GOD BROWN

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# THE GREAT GOD BROWN

## § 1

IN his play, *The Great God Brown*, Eugene O'Neill adopts the innovation of sending his leading characters on to the stage wearing masks. There has never been a great artist yet who was not dissatisfied with his art medium, and who did not at some time or other try to better it by addition or change in some way. This does not mean, though, that a man who is always trying new art-forms is necessarily a great artist. But quite a number of people apparently believe that he must be. They see that the great artist is unconventional, often eccentric, and quite given to the introduction of art-innovations. And, taking all this to mean that the possession of these qualities is the cause of his genius, and not the result of it, they proceed to become unconventional and eccentric, and introduce all sorts of grotesque art-innovations. And thoughtful people, seeing the humbug of it all, become disgusted, and distrustful and suspicious of unconventionality and eccentricity, and ready to meet with doubt all introducers of art-innovations. A great artist's most difficult and persistent enemies are always his apes, and he always,

as soon as ever he begins to get before the public eye, has apes. And this, as are all great, prosperous, comfort-and-luxury-padded ages, is an ape age. 'I looked for great men,' cries Nietzsche; 'I found only apes of their ideals.' Men who are not great have no ideals to be apes of, so they ape other men's ideas. The trouble is that in these swiftly-moving, full times of little discernment and atrophied imagination, these men who are not great are all too often mistaken for and accepted as being what they ape. It is as if a man took the reflection of the moon in the water below him for the moon. For such a man the world would be upside down. In some such way the present-day art-world seems to be very much upside down, and art-works receive most extraordinary valuations. And more thoughtful people turn away from the grotesque, the bizarre, the unconventional, the extraordinary to the more obvious. They have seen the uses the former qualities have been put to before. There is no depth, they have found time and time again, in what has been, with tremendous display, thrust before them as the deep, so they will not waste time seeking behind apparent confusion and obscurity for the deep. They take the more easily perceived and understood and appreciated, many-angled, brilliantly coloured, sentimental, excitement-supplying surface art, and make it do. It will not altogether suffice, but it seems futile time-waste, in an age when time can be utilised in such a wide variety of ex-

pressive ways, looking for more. This is one of the many obstacles that O'Neill and other rare men of his kind have to face. And it is especially a strong and high obstacle to his advance in the older, tireder European countries where tradition is more deeply rooted and conservatism more natural. He is not a surface writer, and his works cannot be read as the works of surface writers can be read. Looking at, instead of into, most plays produced in the older countries these days will suffice the intelligent man to get quickly out of them all that is in them. But such a looking at instead of into will not do with the works of O'Neill. He cannot be read quickly and put on one side, as one reads a modern novel, yet that is the way in which all too many people proceed to read him. And when he becomes unconventional, breaks laws of dramatic construction, adopts startling innovations – well, then they say Shaw and Galsworthy and Barrie do not have to do these things. And they forget that even if all the art-apes do do these things, Ibsen had to do them too. So did Shakespeare.

§ 2

Then, again, O'Neill's brother-American writers have been anything but helpful to him as far as the older countries are concerned. Their methods have sent in advance of them an atmosphere that carries a suspicion that reacts heavily against the works of a

man like O'Neill. George Jean Nathan, the dramatic critic, writes somewhere: 'O'Neill has a lot to answer for. Before he came upon the scene, most of the younger playwrights were content simply to write bad plays and let it go at that. But no sooner did he appear than most of these playwrights began to try to write good plays of the kind he was writing, and to turn out even worse ones than they had turned out before. The only things they had in common with O'Neill were cuss words. Yet they believed that, though they lacked the latter's measure of genius, they could write the species of drama he wrote with one hand tied behind their backs.' But O'Neill has not got more than other men of genius to answer for in this way. He has not, for instance, got quite as much to answer for as Nathan himself. If O'Neill pointed the way for a few bad dramatists, Nathan has pointed the way for a whole rabble of still worse critics. He has won a hearing for himself by being cynical, flippant, irreverent, and, above all, vigorous. It is far easier to be thus than to write even bad dramas. In the United States a multitude of writers are being cynical, flippant, irreverent, and, above all, vigorous. Without Nathan's genius, they believe they can do what Nathan does. But the Nathans of life are not mimics, and the folk who mimic them are only mimics and not Nathans. The trouble is that so few people seem to be able to tell the difference. Nathan, the majority know, has won to high place

by employing tub-thumping showman methods, so they do not see why other equally vigorous tub-thumping showmen should not be granted high place too. The Nathan apes are already flooding the newspapers, magazines, book-shelves of the world with matter abounding in catchy, extravagant, alliterative metaphors and similes, and the descriptive words schoolboys use when there are no masters within earshot, and they feel they are being men. They attack viciously everything their own countries produce, pretending that they do it for their countries' sake. They are bullying, cynical, flippant, irreverent, vulgar, lack practically all true critical sense, and firmly believe that they are Nathans. They are only very ugly little Nathan apes. If O'Neill has to answer for much, Nathan and his fellow-compatriot showmen-geniuses, H. L. Mencken and James Blanch Cabell, have to answer for a whole lot more. They have got their messages across by borrowing the methods of the vulgar, and now the vulgar, whose methods they employed, are getting their own back, and, in a vigorous and whole-hearted manner, are employing them. And O'Neill has to pay along with them. America has poured into Europe in the last decade, and is still pouring in, smart slang, syncopated music, vulgar dances, 'boost' plays. It has sent many other things, but these have so vastly predominated that 'American' has become almost a synonym for them. It is not any

real wonder then that O'Neill's unconventional plays – plays written, for instance, round such subjects as a foul-mouthed stoker, and crews of illiterate seamen, and a strident flash 'nigger,' and primitive animal-passioned men of the soil, and coarse, unmasked sex – have not made great headway in, for instance, England. The wonder really is that they have not been altogether drowned in the flood of American cheapness that they have had to accompany over the Atlantic, and that they have not been altogether dismissed as just smart, loud, notoriety-seeking 'American,' and allowed to go at that.

§ 3

But to return to O'Neill and his masks. I have said that all men of genius show at some time or other dissatisfaction with their art-medium. Michel Angelo did. He not only stretched his natural art-medium almost to breaking point, but he went outside it altogether, and tried sculpture, architecture, and even verse. It just seemed as if he could not get an art-medium big enough and expressive enough to hold all that he had to say. And if Browning is to be believed, Dante was not satisfied with his natural art-medium either, and sought to express himself in an art 'alien to the artist.' He tried to paint a picture; and Raphael too, according to the same authority, endeavoured with his 'silver-pointed pencil, else he only used to draw madonnas,' to write sonnets. Some

artists have even gone to further extremes. Nietzsche tried to compose music, and Wagner to philosophise. Shakespeare stretched his art-medium in all directions too. So did Ibsen. So is doing O'Neill. And the great artists, though they never are interested in doing so, are usually responsible for some sort of art-movements. But they never take part with or join in any art-movements already started. Such movements are only for the art-apes, and are all based on half-truths and only exist in wealthy ages. The great artist's *métier* comes to him in response to his instinctive striving as naturally as a flower grows. He follows it as a chicken cracks its shell. And it is with him never anything more than a means to an end. He does not paint a picture or write a poem or a play to conform to or express some thought-out art theory. He paints or writes in response to an urge, that has come down to him through countless generations, to show his inmost self to those who know their inmost selves well enough to be able to compare them with his. He is a fighter against the restraint that any accepted art-form imposes. But he does not fight against that restraint to destroy it, but to throw it back, to expand the area that it restricts. He is a rebel, but a seeing, knowing, individualistic rebel, and other men's blind, communistic, all-destroying revolutionary art-theories are not for him. He will not be the slave of any art-form, but his art-form he will make his slave. And the better, stronger, more

expressive slave he can turn it into, the better it will serve him. He is driven by some imperative and inexorable within-force to go a certain way in the art-world, and that way, as the pioneer's always is, will be opposed to most other art ways. He is a rebel because he is an artist. Members of art-movements would be artists because they are rebels. It is not the same thing. And the great artist must not be confused with the art-movement people. O'Neill did not write *The Great God Brown* just to put on the stage, as they had never been put on before, people wearing masks. He put masks on the people on the stage the better to reveal the people. By so doing he moved the drama as an expressive art-medium a step forward, just as did Shakespeare in his day, and Ibsen in his.

§ 4

Shakespeare introduced and developed a new form of dramatic construction, thereby shattering all older forms. Ibsen broke most of the accepted laws of dramatic construction of his time and gave us most of those of ours. Now O'Neill comes with his masks to do what in their times Shakespeare and Ibsen did, what only a man, with the clear-sighted self-reliance that genius gives, could do. He is at the same time making a bold attempt to answer a question that many thinking men have been asking for many years. What possible new direction is there left for the real drama, that is the

drama of character revelation and mental tragedy, to take? Some sixty years ago, Tennyson forecasted the time when English drama would die right out, or

> 'flicker down to brainless pantomime,
> And those gilt gauds men-children swarm to see.'

And just a few years back, Thomas Hardy, in his introduction to *The Dynasts*, wondered 'whether mental performance alone may not be eventually the fate of all drama other than that of contemporary or frivolous life.' As Hardy pointed out, 'the meditative world is older, more nervous, more quizzical, than it was.' At the stage to which the general critical mind has developed, the theatre-goer demands a close approximation to reality, or else the admittedly unreal pantomime and gilt-gaud play that Tennyson foretold. The latter of course is not real drama at all. The first great difficulty the real dramatist is and always has been faced with is with his presentation on the stage in a realistic manner of his thinking people. With the perfection of stage mechanism dramas of action can be staged in a manner realistic enough to satisfy the most critical. The play of ideas can also easily be staged in a satisfying manner. In both these classes of play, the characters are subordinate to the action or ideas. They are only puppets. Words and dress and action are quite enough to create all the illusions of reality necessary to carry them. But when the play that deals with mental

tragedy, and all the greatest tragedies are mental tragedies, comes up for stage presentation, it is a totally different matter. In the modern demand for an approximation to reality, the old-fashioned 'aside' and soliloquy have to go. How without them can the mind-struggles of a profound man or woman be presented on the stage? It is to give an answer to this question that O'Neill comes with his masks.

§ 5

Human beings might be roughly divided into two classes – mind people and people of action; people who live more inwardly than outwardly, and people who live more outwardly than inwardly. The former are always introspective; the latter are quite often not introspective at all. The former, looking within themselves, have always more or less a fear hovering over them that others might see them as they see themselves. The other people, who do not look within and cannot see if they try to, never know that fear; wherefore, with nothing like so much intellectual power, they have generally much more confidence, and are much more sure of themselves in matters of everyday life, than are the mind people. So the things they do and say to a certain extent reveal them; they are more or less obvious; they are like actors who have forgotten that they are actors and fully believe they are the parts they play. But the

things the mind people do and say, more often than not serve to keep them concealed. They are like actors who cannot forget that they are actors. They cannot lose themselves in their parts. Very obviously, then, if characters belonging to these two classes of people are to be presented on the stage, different methods must be employed. With the presentation of the outward-living man, little difficulty is experienced. The things he says and his manner of saying them reveal him even when his actions do not. This applies both to a strong character like Hotspur and a weak character like Justice Shallow. The hot-tempered, impetuous, impatient, generous Hotspur lives before us in the words he speaks to the other characters in the play. And Shallow's very first words, 'Come on, come on, come on; give me your hand, sir; give me your hand, sir; an early stirrer, by the rood. And how doth my cousin Silence?' reveals the wordy, self-important, self-satisfied, shallow, little Justice for all time. Shakespeare's method of presenting such characters was to make them speak themselves to the other characters, and then for one other character to sum them up. Falstaff sums up Justice Shallow in this way. And Falstaff has his satellites to shine on, and they in turn illuminate him. Sometimes Shakespeare's outward-living men soliloquise, but such soliloquising is never self-revealing. Take away the soliloquies of Falstaff and Henry V, and you do not

know them any less well; but take away the soliloquies of Hamlet and Macbeth and Iago, and you do not know these characters at all. All this is true of life. If your neighbour is an outward-living man, you will probably soon know him pretty well. You will know how he feels and thinks about certain things and how he is like to act under certain circumstances. But if he is an inward-living man, you will never know him at all even if he enters your house every day and speaks apparently more openly and more friendlily to you than does the outward-living man. Iago will not wear his heart upon his sleeve. Neither will Hamlet nor Macbeth. Nor will their minds' construction be easily read in their faces. They will be weeping when their hearts are laughing and laughing when their hearts are weeping. They will be always concealed. Hamlet's very first speech deals with this matter. To his mother, he says:

> 'Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not seems.
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected 'haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, modes, shows of grief,
> That can denote me truly; these, indeed, seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within that passes show.'

Macbeth is sometimes regarded as a man of action, and the antithesis of Hamlet, the man of thought. But he is an inward-living man and no more a man of action than Hamlet. He thinks too precisely on the event, just as Hamlet does, and is just as helplessly thought-tied after the event as Hamlet is before it. And as Hamlet he stands revealed to us only in soliloquy.

§ 6

But Shakespeare's method of employing the soliloquy, giving up the whole stage often to single characters, so that they could speak out their secret feelings and thoughts, was, by the time Ibsen arrived on the scene, too obviously artificial, too unreal. So Ibsen boldly rejected it and substituted for it the foil. Of course Shakespeare, as in the case of Hamlet and Horatio, used the foil, but Ibsen went further. In Shakespeare, the foil was always less than the character it served. Horatio to Hamlet was only like Bardolph to Falstaff. They were only like faithful dogs one can address one's inmost thoughts to, knowing that they will be listened to sympathetically but never understood. But Ibsen's foils were often deeper than the characters they were foils to. They took the place of the introspective man's own mind. They were as understanding and relieving confessional ears. In his play *The Pretenders*, where his greatest intellectual character, Earl Skule, appears, Ibsen uses soliloquy,

and a foil as well. This foil is the Skald, a poetical creation, who serves as a wholly comprehending ear for the thinking aloud of the Earl. In his later plays, seeking an even closer approximation to reality, Ibsen drops the soliloquy altogether, and uses more and more the foil. But this thinking aloud is still unreal. And it always must be, for the people do not do it in real life. But the dramatist's aim is always to keep pace with his hoped-for audience, and ever to more and more approximate to and keep alive the illusion of the real. He holds before them a mirror, and he wants them to forget that it is a mirror and see not it, but only what is reflected in it. It was in his endeavour to make the more critical people of his age forget his mirror that Ibsen substituted his foil for Shakespeare's soliloquy. For the same reason, O'Neill uses masks in place of Ibsen's foil.

## § 7

All drama has grown out of the earliest saga. And drama is only a branch of the great art of fiction. The first saga sang only deeds. Later sagas sang deeds and also what led up to and away from the deeds. Down these lines, ever developing, the saga has travelled, until it becomes the modern imaginative novel or play. And in the earliest descriptions of what led up to and away from the deeds in the sagas is rooted both the modern work of fiction and the

drama that describes not deeds so much as feelings, emotions, mind-states, experiences, ideas. There the modern introspective, psychological, philosophical novel was born. There, too, was born the modern introspective, psychological, philosophical play. And it is the growing, expanding, multiplying end of one branch of drama. There are other branches. In later years the drama, like all other literary forms, has branched quickly and followed many directions. It has gone in one direction as far as Grand Opera, where character and action and everything else are subordinated to music. Then, in another direction, it has gone as far as plays like *Cairo* and *Kismet*, where everything is subordinated to scenic effect. Then there are melodrama, where character is subordinated to action, and the problem play, where character is subordinated to the solving of social questions, and the play of ideas, where character is subordinated to the interpretation of the author's moral or amoral philosophy. But the really great drama is that where everything is subordinated to the interpretation and revelation of man. It was the drama of Shakespeare and the drama of Ibsen. It is the drama in our own time of O'Neill. And he, throwing convention aside, has, like they did, in search of wider expressive power, given it a new form. A period in his quite natural development is *The Great God Brown* and its masks.

§ 8

All the leading characters in the play are provided with masks. The more outward-living the characters are, the less their masks differ from their real faces. The more inward-living they are, the more opaque their masks are and the more concealing. And all the masks, thick or thin, are protective, and all manufactured by fear. When other characters are on the stage the leading characters wear their masks. When they are alone they look round furtively and stealthily to make sure that they are unobserved, then they remove their masks. When they hear anybody approaching they hastily replace them. Their masks change too, as their lives change, and they have different masks sometimes for different people. Then, occasionally, at times of crisis or suddenly awakened emotion, in the presence of great fear, great anger, great love, great hate, the masks fall off. So we are enabled to see the characters completely, with the illusion of reality not too remote, as we very rarely are enabled to see people in real life, but as they really are. We see them both as they face the world, and as they face God and themselves. And we recognise the truth of them if we are self-knowers at all, because we see in their littleness and frailty, and love and hate, and hope and fear, and at times utter puzzlement, how like to our own hidden, secret selves they really are.

§ 9

O'Neill, with his masks, is like a great and skilful surgeon with a newly-invented, keen, cunning surgical instrument. He can, with their aid and his own splendid insight and skill, most incisively lay bare and expose, living, in clear penetrating light, what before on the stage, at any rate, could only be suggested or, at most, vaguely, mistily illuminated. He has the scientific, introspective mind to light each mind he looks into, whilst, with his new instrument, he dissects, analyses, lays bare. He is cruelly truthful, but his cruelty is that of the surgeon. He is cruel to be kind. He will not close his eyes to anything he sees. He will not gloss over follies and frailties with comforting sentimentality and romance. But his very truth touches with a reflected exquisite tenderness and compassion. He probes, but he pities whilst he probes. He hurts, but he feels the hurt he inflicts. He strips bare the minds and feelings of characters more or less representative of most of us, but there is no sardonic, Mephistophelian cynicism about what he does. There is none of that merely biting, clever smartness that in the world at the present time is everywhere so rife. And he is no Iago embittered and hateful of the man he tortures. There is subtle irony in his work and grim satire, but they are as burning lights that serve to illuminate the immense darkness of the depths beneath them.

And there is the still, rich, living, breathing, encircling beauty that is ever an inspiring concomitant of the profound depths, where all the hopes and optimism that motive human life are born.

§ 10

Let us take as an example of O'Neill's method, his treatment of Brown. Brown, when we first meet him, is an athletic, good-looking, fresh, normal, healthy boy. There is no need for him to wear a mask. He is not greatly intellectual, not introspective, but he has the qualities that in this world make at least for material success. He is Billy Brown. And he succeeds. When we meet him seven years later he is William A. Brown. He is the successful, strong man, with a 'face that suggests a Roman Consul on an old coin (there is an incongruous distinction about it, the quality of unquestioning faith in the finality of its achievement).' Still, in his practical way, he is true to himself and there is still no need to wear a mask. He has all the confidence and satisfaction of success, and the comforting feeling of superiority to those who have not succeeded. There is nothing he fears yet. His confidence has not yet been undermined, and the confident man has no need to wear a mask. But later in the play we meet him with a mask on, a mask that is as his face used to be. He had nothing to hide then. He has now. He has stolen and tried

to use for his own ends what is not his. Brown fails, as Earl Skule in Ibsen's play, *The Pretenders*, fails. Earl Skule steals another man's 'King-thought' and tries to live, realising in himself that thought. But as the Skald prophetically tells him, one may die for another man's ideas, but one cannot live for them. Brown tries to become Dion Anthony and succeeds superficially. He loves Dion's wife, Margaret, and seeing how Dion has succeeded in winning her love, copies Dion. He steals his mask and at first is successful in wearing it. Margaret is deceived. But Brown has to wear a mask himself now. He is no longer true to himself, and, at the very height of his success, alone with his mask off, he is not Dion, not even the Brown he once was, not the Great God Brown the world sees, that his own mask shows the world, but a very fearful, very uncertain, very blind, very earth-touching, very lonely and weak and pitiable Brown. Again, near the end of the play, we see him dying, with his mask fallen off, as all masks do in the presence of death. And once again he is the innocent, maskless boy, Billy Brown, that long ago he was. And Cybel the prostitute, her hard, cruel, coarse, world-facing mask fallen off, too, in the presence of death, mothers him, soothes him, comforts him, tells him to go to sleep. 'Yes, mother,' whispers Brown (then explainingly): 'It was dark and I couldn't see where I was, and they all picked on me.' That sentence, as does old Chris's last

utterance in *Anna Christie* (a companion sentence to this one), might serve as a keynote to the play. All the characters – wearing their world-facing masks, confident enough, sure-purposed, everyday human beings to all appearance – are really always in the dark and cannot see where they are going. And all of them, at some time or other, are like we all are at some time or other, awakened to their blindness. We see them as the world sees us – with masks on; we see them as we only see ourselves – with masks off.

§ 11

Dion Anthony is, in every way, as a character, the antithesis of Brown. He lacks practically all the qualities Brown has, and possesses all the qualities Brown lacks. Brown has all the qualities that make for modern successful citizenship. Anthony has none of those qualities. He might be called a brilliant failure. We first meet him as a boy of about Brown's age. But he is not the ordinary, normal, unimaginative, unintrospective, so-called healthily-minded boy that Brown is. He has a very definite and real mask on when we first meet him. It is a mask with a certain amount of the attractive beauty of his own super-sensitive refined self shining through. But, with the progress of the play, it hardens and becomes cruel, mocking, cynical. And always, from first to last, it is a mask worn over a

soul pursued, taunted, goaded, tortured by the realities and brutalities of what is called civilised life. Here is one who, like Christ and ever so many more of man's legendary heroic figures, was born into the world to suffer for man. The super-sensitive are always life's forerunners and adventurers into the unseen. Always they are the lonely ones – the loved and tortured ones of both gods and men. They are gifted so that they can perceive what people of coarser-sensed natures can never be aware of. They see beauty to which these other people are blind, but they must perforce see ugliness to which these other people are blind also. They know more joys; they suffer more. Dion Anthony, born without a skin to cover him, has to wear his mask as an armour to keep him from touching or being touched. He has got what Brown and all the Browns of the world can never have. It is a mysterious, indefinable, always suggested power. The women feel it. Margaret feels instinctively, intuitively, and never, in spite of all she sees, will disbelieve that this wonderful hidden something is there. She does not know what it is, cannot recognise it when she sees it, but knows it is there. And Cybel knows it, because she has the far-seeing wisdom of deeply-rooted never-ending life. And she sees Dion asleep with his mask off, and can recognise what she sees. But the world does not know it, the world that is ever prone to accept appearance, and judge and value by

appearance. Dion is brilliant. He writes beautifully, paints beautifully, but he never succeeds either as a writer or a painter, because he has no faith in what he does. He sees too far. He is a handsome, strong, gay, clever, irresponsible, independent, fearless, mocking pagan, who laughs at life – to the world. But hear him on himself. 'Listen! One day, when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture on the sand he couldn't draw, and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him! I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Everybody called me cry-baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against the other boy's God and protect me from His cruelty.' As the part he plays he becomes wholly successful where men and women are concerned. He is feared, respected, and grudgingly admired as clever, mocking cynics always are. Billy Brown admires him in this way, and become William A. Brown, envies him, and grown into the Great God Brown, fears him. He knows that he has some mysterious power that he (Brown) has not got, something that apparently he does not value, and what he (Brown) is ready to sell his soul to possess. There is his art-gift (he can add the all-necessary little touches to Brown's architec-

tural plans that Brown can never add). There is his power of being able to see right into the soul of Brown as Brown cannot himself. There is his value to women. Margaret, one kind of woman, loves him; Cybel, an utterly different kind of woman, loves him too. And they won't love Brown. Dion is a drunkard without any sense of responsibility or duty. He is a life failure, but just where Brown fails he succeeds. Brown is dutiful, hard-working, healthy, athletic, rich, successful, has, in fact, all the qualities Dion has not, and which Brown thinks women should naturally value. But they only like him, never love him as they do Dion. But Dion, successfully unsuccessful, is no nearer happiness than the unsuccessfully successful Brown. Margaret, whom he loves, with her womanly intuition vaguely aware of the real Dion, idealises what she is aware of, and loves her idealisation, and marries Dion. But when she sees the real that her idealisation is but a shadow of, she cries out and shrinks away in fear and reaches for her mask. When in his love for her he would show her what he is, when he tears off the mask of the part he plays before the world and becomes his real self, she reaches for her own mask and will have none of him until he replaces his. She can go maskless to him, but he must be for ever masked before her. That is his tragedy, and the tragedy of all hypersensitive, deep-thinking, imaginative, introspective men. Such men are Cassandra-gifted. They can

see where others will never see. They know of that which they will never know. There is nobody who can come down to the depths with them or soar with them to the heights. They have to meet the world at the world's level, wherefore they know, quite possibly, the greatest loneliness man can know. Dion Anthony, before the world, is a mocking, unbelieving, pagan cynic. It is quite possible that all mocking, unbelieving, pagan cynics, and they alone, know just such agonising loneliness as Dion Anthony knew.

§ 12

Just as the two principal male characters in this play are opposites in practically every way, so are the two principal women characters. Socially they are wide apart. Margaret is a lady, Cybel is a prostitute. When we first meet Margaret she is a young girl, romantic, sentimental, whispering her soul-secrets to a midsummer moon. The mask she wears is almost no mask, it is so naïvely transparent. All she is shows through it. Afterwards it thickens and hardens, as its protection becomes more necessary. She has to keep the effect upon herself of her knowledge that her husband is a drunkard and a reprobate hidden behind it from the world. As her troubles increase, and there is more to hide, her mask becomes more set. But never does any mask she wears hide her sweet gentleness, her charm.

She is loyal, generous, always the romantic lover, always the more or less successful deceiver of self. In the last scene she comes wearing widow's weeds, and the mask she always wears now, the mask of the proud, indulgent mother with three sons. 'There is about her manner and voice the sad but contented feeling of one who knows her life-purpose well accomplished, but is at the same time a bit empty and comfortless with the finality of it.' (There is shown in that one little stage direction an insight into human nature that Bernard Shaw rarely if ever touches in any of his plays). She sends off her sons, then being alone, removes her mask. She then 'slowly takes from under her cloak, from her bosom as if from her heart, the mask of Dion as it was at the last, and holds it before her face.' The curtain falls with her worshipping the mask, her memory of him. It is her life-lie. From the time when we first meet her at seventeen years of age, till, on the night when, a middle-aged woman, we see her for the last time, she has known one great constant love. This love for her lover, her husband, her child, in the one being, she will know until she dies. And it is for a mask! The man who lived and died behind the mask she never did know, never could know, never will know. And that fact is wholly symbolic of an ironic truth of life.

## § 13

The second scene in the third act of *The Great God Brown* makes surely one of the profoundest passages in all modern literature. Nobody else has O'Neill's gift of abstracting pure poetry from the sheer primitive coarseness and utter ugliness of life. He does not fear to use manure for the ultimate beautification of his flowers. The dialogue in the scene mentioned between Dion the drunkard and Cybel the prostitute is supreme art. The play has been called a fantasy, but it is a profoundly symbolic play too. Like Ibsen's later plays, its symbolism is firmly based on a substructure of reality. Cybel is an almost purely symbolic character. With her mask on she is just a business-like, utterly practical and unsentimental, disillusioned, man-knowing prostitute. But with her mask off all that goes, and she is simply man-loving, man-understanding, Mother Woman. When we first see her she is a 'strong, calm, sensual, blonde girl of twenty or so, her complexion fresh and healthy, her figure full-breasted and wide-hipped, her movements slow and solidly languorous like an animal's, her large eyes dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts. She chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end!' She is Earth; Miss Earth, Mother Earth, Dion calls her, Earth whence all life comes, and goes. She symbolises the mother of man. Indifferently calm to the

present, with her eyes on the future, her task is to see that human life is carried on down the ages, protecting the young and the old, the weak and the strong, watching calmly and protectingly over man's entrance into life and his exit from it. Dying, they return to her, and she comforts them and accompanies them to the Gateway to the Beyond. All she is for is to see that mankind continues and endures. When at the end the police-captain demands the name of Brown, who has just passed away in her arms, she asks a little time to think it out. Who is this that she has just seen fall asleep like a small boy, very puzzled, very tired? She gives the police-captain his name: Man.

§ 14

*The Great God Brown* is a magnificent poem of life. It is full of grim, lie-penetrating irony, but it is an irony always in the service of profound truth. The characters are handled with a delicate tenderness as one would handle sacred, holy things. And the clear light that is thrown on what is best and worst in them is the light of a great humanity-love and compassion. Much profoundly religious feeling has gone into the making of this play.

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# THE FOUNTAIN

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# THE FOUNTAIN

## § 1

I WOULD like to see Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Fountain*, played as James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* was played in London in 1923, by a company of adept actors, and mounted as that play was mounted, and accompanied by suitable and never too obtrusive music. It would surely lend itself to such production. It is so gorgeously rich and musical and sad and gallant. Never altogether losing touch with reality, it carries one on such amazingly fantastical and deeply mystical imaginative flights. And it is so colourful. Beginning in a romantic, colourful time in a romantic, colourful city, Granada, it follows a romantic, colourful geographical belt round the world to the Golden West, with ever, like the glow of a wonderful gaudy dream to lure it on to action, mystical, magical, far-away Cathay. It is said that Flaubert used to write his novels attuned, as it were, to different colours. *The Fountain* is surely attuned to red and gold. It has ever a crimson, golden gorgeousness about it, and in the background, ever rising, falling, like flame, ever changing, flaring, glaring, colouring the play like a tropical sunset does

a tropical sea. That background is a sheer riot of reflecting colour. The author must have just revelled in the richness of his materials. It is an extravagantly rich, romantic picture of an extravagantly rich, romantic time and place. Its theme is a romantic one too, that ever calls for romantic, colourful treatment, and never will grow old. It is a theme that demands at its handling hardness and clearness, and tenderness and compassion. It is like Nietzsche's eternal recurrence rendered in poetry. The waters of the fountain rise up proudly, exaltedly, confidently, and fall, and rise up again in the same way in other fountains. And youth rises and falls and rises, lives and dies and is reborn. The cycle ever repeats itself, eternally recurs. And youth's living is a gay, careless, reckless, thoughtless, unweighed, and unappreciated rapture, and its dying a regretful, remorseful, bitter sadness.

§ 2

Of all Eugene O'Neill's plays, *The Fountain* is surely the most purely poetic. The two scenes of the first act, with their picturesque backgrounds, the beautifully painted-in courtyard of the old Moor's home and the equally beautifully painted-in lantern-lit deck of the ship with the sails and the sky above and the sea about, and before these backgrounds the rising and falling interplay of picturesquely-clad and picturesquely-minded characters, is surely well-nigh

perfectly done. Every detail seems to be selected and set down with all the unerring instinct of true art. And the richness of the dialogue! the sheer poetry of so many of the lines! Juan says of Columbus, 'I saw him to-day. He was riding his flea-bitten mule as if he were a Cæsar in a triumph. His eyes were full of golden cities.' And Luis cries scornfully at those whose talk is all of gold, 'Materialists! You would sack heaven and melt the moon for silver!' I do not, in fact, know of any other scene in any other play where words and colour and action move in such perfect unison as they do in these two scenes. I know I have only to close my eyes and I can visualise in clearest detail that courtyard to the old Moor's house. I can see all that is in it and hear all that is in it. I can hear the splashing of the waters of the fountain, the clink of goblets, the sad wistfulness, and the loud merriment and the anger. And did ever characters live more clearly before one's closed eyes? There comes the proud and stately old Moor with his courtly manners and his fierce, defiant shout to heaven, 'Whoever the victor, there is no conqueror but Allah!' There comes tall, handsome, stern Juan Ponce de Leon, soldier of Spain, all cold logical reason and golden visions, a sentimentalist wearing a steel mask of cynicism and mockery, a romantic, disciplined by the ambitious thinker that he is. And Luis de Alvaredo, his friend, ever lovably, naturally young. He drinks

and gambles and sings and jests and grows melancholy. He weeps bitterly over the old Moorish poet he has captured and whom they murder, and quickly forgets. And Diego Menendez with 'the pale long face, the thin cruel mouth, the cold, self-obsessed eyes of the fanatic.' And Vicente de Cordova, grey-haired, stern, soldierly, suspicious, unhumorous; and Maria his wife, who just steals in to plant the seed of tragedy in the play; and the three nobles, Oviedo, Castillo, Mendoza. In the stage direction the last three are beautifully given. 'They are the type of adventurous cavaliers of the day – cruel, courageous to recklessness, practically uneducated – knights of the true Cross, ignorant of and despising every first principle of real Christianity – yet, carrying the whole off with a picturesque air.' Last of all, there is the old fanatic Moorish poet who, when the company would have him sing of treasure, sings of the Fountain, the Fountain he has heard spoken of in his Eastern wanderings, the Fountain of Life, the Fountain of Eternal Youth. Menendez the fanatic sees idolatry in this poet's saying that the Fountain will only reveal itself to the chosen, and the practical, unimaginative cavaliers ask, 'Is this his treasure?' and see in his song a mockery of themselves. Juan, who has schooled himself to regard Love and Youth as only poets' lies, to be repressed and harnessed for the use of Glory, mocks this singing of Love and Youth. Only Luis, poet himself, under-

stands. Maria de Cordova is not there. She who loves, and has lost her youth with which one wins love, would surely have understood. Juan, with her last words to him still in his ears, says: 'The tale is always told to the wrong person. There was one here not long ago who would have given pearls for drops from that same fountain.' Then did ever a play's scene end more finely, more picturesquely, more gallantly than does this one? That ending is like a sort of inspired gesture, a very beautiful, youthful defiance of sadness and ugliness and suffering, of all, in fact, that Fate threatens and holds in store. Juan and Luis are left. Luis is still sorrowing over the death of his captured fellow-poet, and the sadness that Maria's confession has planted in Juan's heart, the sadness he hides under his mocking words, the sadness he endeavours to suppress with cold logic, is still there.

'JUAN: . . . Thus all works out for the best in this fair world! But a rare thing dies – and I'm sad, Luis (*shaking himself and taking a goblet of wine*). Come, forget sad nonsense. We will drink to voyaging with Don Christopher – and to the battles before the golden cities of Cathay!

LUIS (*recovering his spirits – grabbing a bottle*): Lucifer fire your cities! I drink to my fountain!

JUAN: Your health, Sir Lying Poet!

LUIS: And yours, Sir Glory-Glutton!

*(They laugh, and clink goblet and bottle, and drink, as the curtain falls.)*'

§ 3

In the next scene, a year later, on Christopher Columbus' flagship, nearing America, Juan is still young, still the self-willed Youth- and Love-despiser, still the worshipper at the shrine of Glory, and Spain. And Luis is still the destiny-spoiled child, the lovable boy. He has all the vices and no vice. He is still irresponsible, still a gambler and drinker and jester. He still has his fountain as Juan still has his dreams of the far-off golden Cathay he would conquer with his sword for Spain. The sympathetic contrast between these two characters, the soldier who has enslaved his youth and the poet who is youth's slave, the man who hides himself proudly from all and the man who cannot help revealing himself to all, is beautifully done too, and is still running like a rich air through the play when in the next act some twenty years later we meet all the characters again. Juan is now Governor of Porto Rico, and Luis is a Dominican monk. Luis has put on manhood and found himself; Juan has put off his youth and lost for ever the man he was. The man of iron is failing, the dreamer is becoming supreme. Juan is still a mocker, but his mockery is far more forced, far more bitter. He is so much more in need of it as a protection now. Then he mocked at youth and love and

poetry, and was proud of himself, and worshipped Glory and Spain. But Spain has deserted him, and Glory without youth's enthusiasm to gild it is no longer so much worth while, and he is no longer proud of himself. Where he mocked at youth and love and poetry, he now mocks at himself, and God. In the first scene Maria de Cordova tells Juan of the great love she has for him, and knows he pities her, and asks God to pity her who is so pitied. She tells Juan her heart is dead now her love is told. She bids him farewell. 'You are noble,' she adds, 'the soul of courage, a man of men. You will go far, soldier of iron – and dreamer. God pity you if those two selves should ever clash! You shall have all my prayers for your success – but I shall add, Dear Saviour, let him know tenderness to recompense him when his hard youth dies.' Now those two selves have clashed, his hard youth has died, and there is yet no tenderness. 'I have fought small things for so long,' he says, 'that I am small. My spirit has rusted in chains for twenty years. Now it tends to accept them – to gain peace. . . . If I could only feel again my old fire, my energy of heart and mind – ! If I could be once more the man who fought before Granada – ! But the fire smoulders. It merely warms my will to dream of the past. It no longer catches fire in deeds.' And then comes Beatriz – the daughter of Maria whom he had pitied because she loved him when he was young and she had lost her youth. And Beatriz loves

the image of what he was in her mother's eye, the gallant soldier who had fought before Granada, and pities him with all the cruel kind pity of youth because he is old. And he loves her, loves her and sees in her more than a woman! 'She is the Spirit of Youth, Hope, Ambition, Power to dream and dare!' She is all that he has lost. She is Love and Beauty of Love. And he loves her with all the intensity of Youth's first love – when Youth is dead! In the first scene of the play Juan says to Maria, 'Why must you ruin our rare friendship for a word that every minstrel mouths? (*Then with irritation*) Love, love, love we chatter everlastingly. We pretend love alone is why we live! Bah! Life is nobler than the weak lies of poets – or it is nothing!' Later he says: 'Youth! Is youth a treasure? Then are we all – except Vicente – priceless rich; and yet, God's blood, one has but to look to see how poor we are!' And Beatriz comes to give him the 'noble friendship' he gave to Maria. Hear him now. (*With all the power of his will in his words*) 'Let me be for ever damned if Nature will only grant me youth upon this earth again!

LUIS (*horrified*): Juan! You defy your God!

JUAN: There is no God but Love – no heaven but Youth!'

Thus the whirling of time brings its revenges. And the man of iron, beaten by the dreamer at last, follows his mad fantastic quest for that which he

believes alone can give him Beatriz's love – that chimerical fountain the old Moor sang of, and that Nano, the Indian, has heard of – the Fountain of Eternal Youth.

§ 4

From now on the play becomes ever more fantastical, ever more mystical. In the end, Juan, tended to the last by the faithful Luis, dies happy, in a Dominican monastery. In his youth he was the fountain water leaping up strongly, driven skywards by the inexorable life-force. Then he looked only up, and the words of Maria, the fountain waters falling downwards, to him meant little. And when he is the fountain water falling downwards, Beatriz, the water rising up again, passes him. And her words to him mean what his meant to Maria de Cordova – all. And then the water is in the fountain pond again whence it came, whence it goes. Juan finds peace at last, and eternity, and God. The ending of the play is very beautiful. Beatriz has found in Juan's nephew the image of what Juan was in her mother's eyes. She loves him, and the young lovers come to the dying Juan. He is very sad. He has hoped to the last, and now youth comes to rob him of his last hope. But with the going of hope comes that 'unhoped serene' the poet has sung about. Juan blesses them whilst they pity, and going out, and quickly forgetting, as youth ever will, in the healthy, happy

egoism of love, they sing their song. Juan listens, and to him comes Luis. Then, –

'LUIS: Juan! (*He hears the singing and is indignant.*) Have they lost all feeling. I will soon stop – (*he starts for the door in rear*).

JUAN (*in a ringing voice*): No! I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol! Juan Ponce de Leon is past! He is resolved into the thousand moods of beauty that make up happiness – colour of sunset, of to-morrow's dawn, breath of the Great Trade Wind – sunlight on grass, an insect's song, the rustle of leaves, an ant's ambitions – (*in an ecstasy*) Oh! Luis, I begin to know eternal youth. I have found my Fountain! O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop, my soul. (*He dies; Luis bows his head and weeps.*)

FATHER SUPERIOR (*enters from the right*): Vespers. (*Then in a voice of awe as he stares at Juan*) Is he – dead?

LUIS (*aroused – exaltedly*): No! He lives in God! Let us pray. (*Luis sinks on his knees beside Juan's body, the Father Superior beside him. He lifts his eyes and clasped hands to heaven, and prays fervently. The voices of Beatriz and the nephew in the Fountain Song seem to rise to an exultant pitch. Then the chant of the monks swells out, deep and vibrant. For a moment the two strains blend into harmony, and fill the air in an all-comprehending hymn of the mystery of life.*)'

## § 5

In *The Great God Brown* are distinct whisperings suggestive of the subject of *The Fountain* – what one may call the nostalgia of lost youth. In the very beginning, Billy Brown's mother says, 'The nights are so much colder than they used to be! Think of it, I once went moonlight bathing in June when I was a girl – but the moonlight was so warm and beautiful in those days, do you remember, Father?' Then a little later on in the play, Dion Anthony's mother says: 'It's cold. June didn't use to be cold. I remember the June when I was carrying you, Dion – three months before you were born. (*She stares up at the sky.*) The moonlight was warm, then. I could feel the night wrapped around me like a grey velvet gown lined with warm sky and trimmed with silver leaves!' Then in the last scene of all, Margaret has her say. 'But the nights now are much colder than they used to be. Think of it; I went in for moonlight bathing in June when I was a girl. It was so warm and beautiful in those days. . . .' It is always the way. When we are young we look nowhere but ahead, and when we are no longer young we look back. And we always yearn most for what we have not got, and yearning beautifies. When we are children, we look forward to the time when we will be grown-up, and grown-up, childhood always seems the happier time. Man comes up like a flower

and is cut down. There is the budding, the blooming, the blowing. And the budding time, the time of opening into light and life with all the thrilling anticipation of finding one's secret dreams come true, is most certainly a good and beautiful time. But the bud does not know. That is one of the queer, illusory things about life that makes it so optimistic. We know that life has pains and troubles in store for us. We know we have got to die. But when we are young we paint all those things out under dreams of glory. We look forward with keenest anticipation to what life can give. And when we are old we look back on life, and under dreams of the joyful, dreaming time youth was, paint out all the ills and troubles and disappointments that we know were there. At least, the tendency is with us all to do so. That is all part of the tremendous optimism of life. And like everything else when one possesses it, impatiently waiting for hasty fulfilment of dreamed-of promises, one is extravagant of youth. It is only when it is gone it becomes a precious thing. 'How oft,' sings the poet, 'that stone that we have thrown away, when others pick it up, becomes a gem.' It is like that with health. It is like that with youth. The bud does not know of the glory that it possesses. It only wants to bloom. It lives recklessly, dangerously, improvidently. One is faithless to youth when one is young. One is a traitor to it. One beats it, kicks it, curses it, jeers at it. And then all too often one

awakens to its value when it has gone, when it is too late. It is then one yearns for that which gave warmth and beauty to the moonlight and the June nights. When we are young, life is beautiful, because it is coloured by the dreams of what one may be when one is no longer young. And when one is no longer young, one is sad, for that beautified time of youth can never be again, and so many of its dreams that were so beautiful and beautifying have become realities, and are about us hard and set like coral that the sea has forever left, that once, under the sea, was fresh and alive and rich with colours, and now is grey and cruel-looking and unbeautiful with decay. So one, a drop in the fountain of life going up, sees only the sun of glory on high, and is careless of the water fallen that one day one must become. And then there is the turning over and one becomes the fallen water one was once so careless of. And the blowing flowers must watch the buds bursting, and accept, and resign themselves. They cannot be buds again.

§ 6

There are quite a number of the greater poets who have sung mighty songs on this theme of the life and death of Youth. Goethe dealt with it in *Faust*. There Faust, an old man wise and knowledgeful as a human being can be, hears the young people in the early morning passing by on their way to the Fair.

They are all burning enthusiasm, living expectancy. Laughter is threaded through their simple speech like pearls on a string. They dance on their way. They are alive with the greatest joy man or woman can know, the joy of ample free giving. They are off to pour out their best as man's great common offering to the gods. They are advancing on the dream-glorified realities. And, of course, they know not what they do. Nor would they believe if they were told. With Youth, experience is the only teacher. He will not listen to the experienced man's words. Man would never have reached the stage of being man if Youth ever had so listened. The beautified blindness that gives colour to the prizes of life is essential. Ibsen's 'life-lie' is one of Providence's wise provisions for getting its work done by man. Faust, on the other hand, knows. He is wise in experience. He has blown away the life-lie, dug under appearance. He has thought; he has experimented; he has read. He has something that the young people have not. But they in turn have something that he has not. And does his gift of seeing bring in such reward as does theirs of being blind? No! For that which they have and do not value, he, like Juan Ponce de Leon, would sell to the powers of Hell his immortal soul.

§ 7

Ibsen uses practically the same theme in *The Master Builder*. He was ever a man to grasp at personal experiences as matter for his plays. When he was quite an old man, he became infatuated with a young girl. He must then have yearned for his lost youth. What man under similar circumstances would not? The whole experience became one of his best plays, with its theme one very similar in outline to that of *The Fountain*. When Hilda Wengel comes to Solness, he sees his lost youth just as Juan sees his when Beatriz comes to him. And both Solness and Juan realise at once what it was that has been for so many years making them heart-sick; that has robbed them both of their once boasted strength, and all the real zest of life. It was the youth they treated so harshly when they had it, the youth to which they were false. In his world, Solness is in much the same position as Ibsen was in his. Ibsen was successful then, the accepted master-dramatist of the world. He was creating great plays. These plays were possessed of greater intellectuality; they were better constructed; they were infinitely richer in life-experience than were the plays of his younger days. But they lacked something those plays had. There is not the pure, soaring lyricism in, say, *An Enemy of the People* that there is in *Love's Comedy*. That latter play is not solid and strong like

his later plays, but its enthusiastic idealism touches heights that possibly Ibsen never reached again. Why? Ibsen must have asked himself the reason, and gives as answer to his question – *The Master Builder*. Solness, the master builder, is successful. As a creator of mighty buildings he stands alone. He can plan such buildings, larger, stronger, possibly more impressive than those he planned when he was young. But he knows himself they are not so beautiful. He tries to convince himself that they are, tries to accept the world's judgment. He fights against himself, and he fears. In spite of what he wants to believe he knows that his buildings lack that inspired something he cannot catch again. He cannot give as once he could. He cannot pour himself into what he does. He cannot climb as once he could. The latter is the secret that haunts him. He fears his weakness will be found out. And his fear, as fear ever does, makes him cruel and ungenerous. He fears someone will come, possessed of what he once had, of what he now lacks. He fears the younger generation will come and bring to its work, even though it lack his knowledge and genius, that fire of inspired enthusiasm and never-doubted belief that once was his. It was that which enabled him to climb the steeple he had built, what time with the arrogant courage of youth he threw forth his challenge to the supreme Master Builder of all. And that supreme Master Builder accepted the challenge.

Success, comfort, applause, responsibility, all things foreign to youth; all things he swore to his youth to scorn and reject if offered as bribes to forgo youth, were offered to him by that supreme Master Builder. It was then Solness fell as Faust fell. He accepted all these tempting things. He deserted his youth. He became greater and greater in the land, a man of standing and position, a leading citizen, the master builder he now is. But now his conscience is troubled, that conscience that once was never troubled, and the home he builds himself, spacious, rich, beautiful, in its way, is to him cold, like a tomb. Then, in the form of Hilda Wengel, his youth that he has feared, and whose re-coming he had dreaded, the youth he deserted and was a traitor to, returns, not as he expected it would, to reproach him, but as youth ever is, generous and undoubting, to remind him of the promises he once made to it. He had pictured castles in the air for it, promised it a kingdom. It comes for those castles, for that kingdom. In the person of Hilda Wengel this youth is clean, clear-cut, ambitious, enthusiastic, inspired, idealistic, and its conscience is 'robust.' It scorns self-doubts, and pity, and man-given duties and responsibilities. It gives him back the faith in himself he had left in its keeping. It points the way up the heights Solness has not been able to climb for years. Up there is the way to the promised castles in the air, the promised kingdom. And with his newly-given youth again to

guide and inspire him, he does that which he has never attempted, never dared to attempt, for years. He climbs once again, and defies the supreme Master Builder once again, and falls. He dies for youth. So he redeems himself. *The Master Builder* has been called a play of retribution. Rather, it is a play of redemption.

§ 8

Great minds, it is said, think alike. They must. The nearer to the gods men get, the more their view of things will be like the gods'. The nearer their views will be to the gods' eye-view of men. Their minds will be alike. And the solutions these minds give of like problems must be ever more and more alike. It is almost surely because of this that so many of Eugene O'Neill's ideas run almost parallel with Ibsen's. John Gabriel Borkman puts ambitious service to his country before love of woman. He pushes aside on his onward self-disciplined march the woman he loves and who loves him. Solness is a traitor to Youth and Borkman is a traitor to Love. And faithful Youth returns in the end to Solness, and faithful Love returns in the end to John Gabriel Borkman, to show them what they were really traitors to. And Juan Ponce de Leon mocks and jeers at Youth and Love, and disciplines himself against them. And in the person of Beatriz, they both come back to him to show him what it was he so

mocked and jeered at, and so disciplined himself against.

§ 9

Sometimes poets sing mighty songs to passing things, and for a little while their songs are sung. But when the things are some time passed, the songs die, the poets are forgotten. But there are certain things that do not pass, that, like the sun and the sea, and night and day, and death, endure down all the ages. As song-subjects, such things never grow old. That is why the love-song never grows old, nor the youth-song. There are always lovers on earth, and always youth. And those who have loved and lived will always thrill to Solomon's songs and *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Fountain* has tragedy in it, and cruelty, and bitterness, and biting satire. But its theme is one that does not die. It is a love-song and a youth-song. It is, too, like *The Great God Brown* that precedes it, a deeply religious play. O'Neill is scathingly, bitingly satiric, against all those gaudily-coloured, marble and brass, superstitious, witch-doctory sort of systems called religions by their followers. He is against all gods carven out of wood or stone, or just man's imagination, in man's image. He is always against the word, always for the spirit behind the word. His uncompromising, critical attitude here is bound to gain him enemies. But his courage and passionate sincerity, and generous beauty-giving, will surely win for him many, far more worth while, friends.

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# MARCO MILLIONS

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# MARCO MILLIONS

## § 1

IN *The Fountain* occur many lines and passages suggesting themselves as the germs whence quite conceivably originated Eugene O'Neill's next play, *Marco Millions*. There is mention frequently of the Great Khan of Cathay and of the cities of gold that Marco Polo saw. And there are frequent cutting remarks directed at the unimaginative materialists. 'Materialists!' cries Luis scornfully, 'you would sack heaven and melt the moon for silver.' And again: 'Fools! Beauty is lost to you. Your souls clink like coppers. . . . Come, let us drink! We'll all to Cathay with Don Christopher. You can burrow for dung there – but I will search for the fountain.' And later Nano, the Indian, says contemptuously: 'They see only things, not the spirit behind things. Their hearts are muddy as a pool in which deer have trampled. Listen. Their Medicine Men tell of a God who came to them long ago in the form of a man. He taught them to scorn things. He taught them to look for the spirit behind things. In revenge they killed him. They tortured him as a sacrifice to their Gold God.' And once Juan cries to Don

Christopher: 'I agree with you, Don Christopher – a weary voyage! Adventurers lusting for loot to be had by a murder or two; nobles of Spain dreaming greedy visions of wealth to be theirs by birthright; monks itching for the rack to torture useful subjects of the Crown into slaves of the Church! And for leader to have you, Don Christopher – you who will pillage to resurrect the Crusades! Looters of the land, one and all! There is not one who will see it as an end to build upon! We will loot and loot, and, weakened by looting, be easy prey for stronger looters.' That last sentence, indeed, puts into words exactly the warning note that is struck in the prologue of *Marco Millions*. But whilst the ideas that ultimately connected up and grew into *Marco Millions* were plainly enough set down in *The Fountain*, one cannot help feeling that the motive grew out of some other experience. There is always a certain bitterness and disillusionment whence satire springs. Was *Marco Millions* motived by any hostile, or superliteral, or unimaginative receptions accorded *The Fountain*? If so, it would not be the first time a play grew out of the reception accorded another play. O'Neill, one feels, must love *The Fountain*. It is his most richly beautiful play. He has most generously given of his best to it. He has poured life-blood into it. And if such a thing were coldly or misunderstandingly received, and most deeply beautiful things in fat and pursy ages such as this are so received,

then there would be feeling that could easily enough turn those thoughts already expressed in *The Fountain* into a full play like *Marco Millions*. What sort of reception the American critics gave *The Fountain* I do not know. What sort of reception the English critics in the main would give such a play, if they gave it any, one can easily imagine. 'Yes, quite good,' they would say, in effect, 'for an American.' They would be superior, academic, unimaginative. Then they would write at length about what some forgotten playwright did and said ages ago, and what some forgotten critic said about him. And one has an idea that the play was not understandingly received by the American public. One gets this idea from the effect of the play, *Marco Millions*, on Marco himself, as O'Neill describes that effect. Also, from Marco's (remembering that Marco is a symbolical representation of that public) attitude towards the theatre. 'There's nothing better,' says he in one place, 'than to sit down in a good seat at a good play after a good day's work in which you know you have accomplished something, and after you've had a good dinner, and just take it easy and enjoy a good thrill or a good laugh and get your mind off serious things until it's time to go to bed.' The effect upon Marco of the play, *Marco Millions*, is set down with ruthless clearness as the entire epilogue of the play.

§ 2

The complete works of all the great dramatists are like chains, the links of which are symbolical of definite life-experiences undergone by their authors. In other words, all great dramas are more or less objective and autobiographical. This is a sweeping statement, but it will bear closest analysis. In his foreword to *Marco Millions*, O'Neill writes of Marco Polo: 'He dictated the books of his travels, but left the traveller out. He was no author.' This is satire, but, as is all real satire, it is based on what is true. The great author never leaves himself out. 'The great thing,' wrote Ibsen, 'is to hedge about what is one's own – to keep it clear and free from everything outside that has no connection with it; and furthermore, to be extremely careful in discriminating between what one has observed and what one has experienced; because only the last can be the theme for creative work. It we attend strictly to this, no everyday commonplace subject will be too prosaic sublimated into poetry.' Turgenev's advice to young writers was always: 'to depict with truth, with remorseless truth, one's own sensations.' 'A poet,' writes Nietzsche, 'is a traitor to his experiences; he exploits them.' At first sight it seems ridiculous to suggest that plays like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, for instance, can be autobiographical. Shakespeare was not a nobleman or a prince. He did not put a sword

through any eavesdropping Polonius. He did not murder any gracious Duncan. He did not live in Denmark or Scotland. But he might have, and probably did face Fate-set tasks in the same way as did Hamlet and Macbeth. And if he did not he might have known somebody who did. He was not Hamlet, he was not Macbeth. But their thoughts and feelings, their hopes, fears, hesitations, remorse, were all those he must have known himself. If he had not been an introspective he never could have shown the introspective workings of the minds of Hamlet and Macbeth. Hamlet and Macbeth were symbolical representations of Shakespeare. And Lear was symbolically representative of somebody Shakespeare once intimately knew, and whom Life treated as it did Lear, and who reacted to the treatment in the way Lear did. So was Bottom a symbolical representation of a life-experience. So were Shylock and Antonio and Mercutio and Sly and Falstaff and Ophelia and Cleopatra, and all the rest. From observation and a retentive memory Shakespeare got the externals of his characters. He got things they said and the way they said them. He got features, mannerisms. He got things they did, and the clothes they wore. All these were external experiences, registered impressions. But the life he put into them he got out of himself. When he gave them hearts and minds he looked into himself, and fitted them with parts of his own. So they were all

what he had seen; what he had felt. They were expressions of himself. In other words, they were items in his autobiography. And never has such another complete autobiography of a man been given to the world as is this of the man so many people still believe unknown. Unknown? If we know ourselves then we know him from his works, and we know the world he lived in possibly better than we know ourselves and the world we live in. As we read those works, we move through the life of Shakespeare; play, as it were, at being Shakespeare. We watch the world he watched, see what he saw, feel what he felt. We notice storms, landscapes, seascapes, moonlight nights, winter days, spring days, gardens, forests, flowers, birds, beasts, insects, reptiles. We meet (though they are dressed up in the fancy costumes of long ago) the men and women Shakespeare met. And we are impressed by what we see as he was. With his marvellous art-gift he has set down for all time, places, things, events, people – all experiences, and all the descriptions blending and connecting, and clashing and contrasting, give a realist picture of his whole time- and space-enwrapped life-environment. His whole works make up a stupendous symbolical representation of himself.

§ 3

It is the same with Ibsen. Ibsen lacks the vast poetic breadth and depth and height of Shakespeare. He is a mighty poet, but he is more as a black-and-white artist, an etcher, where Shakespeare works in oils. He cannot see into the depths or the heights as far as Shakespeare can, or as far into the past or the future. Nor is his sight so keen for immediate things. He is great where, as Emerson has said, Shakespeare is superlatively great. And his life-environment and his reaction to it, which is himself, is set down in his plays. And his life-course can, in an approximate way, be traced through his plays. They are, like Shakespeare's, symbolical of life-experiences. In *The Pretenders*, for instance, we see him struggling in the life-current. We see him failing to make good where his younger and more superficially brilliant rival, Björnstjerne Björnson, so easily succeeds. He feels his defeat, and symbolises the experience in his mighty play. He shows King Hakon, brilliant, brave, confident, and sure with the confidence and sureness of those who do not see too clearly before and after the approaching event. And he shows Earl Skule, the far profounder man, who sees too far and too clearly. He has no definite, concrete thing to aim at. He has no 'king-thought' as Hakon has. Earl Skule fails, trying to succeed, as Hakon succeeds, as Ibsen fails, trying to succeed as Björnson

succeeds. So a life-experience is the birth-throes of a great play. It is the same with Peer Gynt. It is the same with Brand. Read Ibsen himself on Brand. The critics had received it as moral propaganda. 'It has been misconstrued,' Ibsen writes. 'The misconstruction has evidently arisen from the fact of Brand's being a priest, and from the problem being of a religious nature. But both these circumstances are entirely unimportant. I could have constructed the same syllogism just as easily on the subject of a sculptor or a politician as a priest. I could have found an equally satisfactory vent for the mood that impelled me to create if, instead of Brand, I had written, say, of Galileo – making him, of course, hold his ground, and not admit that the earth stands still. . . . On the whole, there is a great deal more of masked objectivity in Brand than anyone has so far perceived.' Then of *Hedda Gabler* he writes: 'What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies upon a background of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day.' This is the very opposite of what so-called dramatists like Bernard Shaw want to do. They only use characters to reveal social conditions and principles. They have no poetry in them. What Ibsen writes above will probably apply to all and faithfully describe the motives of all his plays. The men and women he draws, however much they might be disguised in the garments of

history and romance, are symbolical representations of men and women who have entered and become of his life-environment. And the whole of his life-work, like Shakespeare's, becomes an attempt at a faithful description of that environment and his reaction to it. And where will an artist find a clearer experience to symbolically express than in the reception accorded his art-work? That reception must please or displease him. It will be new matter to pour into his art. Ibsen made great use of such experiences. He wrote *The Doll's House*, and the hostile reception accorded it brought *Ghosts*. And the hostile reception accorded *Ghosts* was the reason of the coming into being of *An Enemy of the People*. And one cannot help feeling that it must have been in response to some such experience that *Marco Millions* was born.

§ 4

The O'Neill who wrote *Marco Millions* must have plainly passed through a more or less bitter experience that left him disgusted, angry, contemptuous, and very clear-eyed and disillusioned. But the artist is always superior to any man. If *Marco Millions* was born of bitterness, it is not bitter. The artist, possibly in spite of the man, saw to that. *Marco Millions* shows man himself as he does not often see himself, doing what he does not know he is doing. It is a mighty satire, a satire worthy of a place beside *Gulliver's*

*Travels* and *Penguin Island*. Quite possibly Time will show it to be more deeply rooted and higher reaching than either of them. Certainly there is more poetry in it. And, having read it, one is left with a very definite impression that it must have been written by one who, if he has succeeded, has failed also. By one who, in other words, has found failure in success. And by one far too self-truthful to allow himself to be blinded to the failure by the success.

§ 5

The refrain of Kipling's poem, 'The Fabulists,' is, that unless you please, you are not heard at all. O'Neill's brilliant compatriot, George Jean Nathan, goes even further than this, and holds that, unless you advertise, however great your genius may be, you will surely die unknown. In his startling book, *The House of Satan*, he writes in one place: 'The completely sincere, honest, and first-rate man, save he practises a measure of mountebankery, stands no more chance of attracting attention in the United States at the present time than a completely above-board politician or a new Haydn. A few men of his sort will recognise him and his abilities, but the great mass of people will remain wholly oblivious to him. To get the ears of the great mass, the first-rate man must speak to them (and conduct himself toward them) as a second-rate, third-rate, and even

tenth-rate man. By the hocus-pocus due to the circumstances of like liking like, he may contrive to obtain their attention, and, having obtained it, to unload gradually into their temporarily diddled heads what forthright ideas he desires to.' If this is true of the United States, it is, and always has been, equally true of all other countries and, probably, all other times. Even Shakespeare had to 'tickle the ears of the groundlings.' He gave them the melodrama they wanted, with any amount of excitement and blood and murder and ghosts and sudden death in it, with his truth wrapped up inside like drugs in sugar-coated pills. And it was certainly not the profound truths of Ibsen's plays that won him a hearing in the end. It was not the poetry or human insight in them. It was the fact that he, probably quite fortuitously, made use of social problems that happened to be at the time very much in vogue. He gave the world a living woman, and the world saw in her a symbolification of a political movement. The world asked for a stone and he gave it bread, and they crowned him because they thought the bread was stone. So Ibsen succeeded by failing. And one cannot help feeling that at the time of his writing *Marco Millions* it must have been much like that with O'Neill. He had, at that time, won success. And that is one of the remarkable things about his career. For surely no great man had ever advertised less than he had when success came. He had not either spoken

or conducted himself as a second-rate, third-rate, or even tenth-rate man. Possibly it was the originality of his methods that had made an appeal. Possibly it was the touch of melodrama and picturesqueness and forcefulness that is about *Anna Christie* and *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones*. Possibly it was the help he had from Nathan. But there it was. He was recognised as the leading American dramatist, and by some people as more than that. His plays were being staged everywhere, and in America, at least, were drawing crowded houses. In all that lay success. His failure, then, must have been in the fact that, having gained the ears he wanted to, he could not make them hear anything but what they wanted to hear. He was acclaimed, applauded, rewarded, but was he understood? Once he sailed the seas as a common sailor. He was almost surely then very lonely, and certainly never understood. At the time of writing *Marco Millions* he was a well-known man. But was he any less lonely, and more understood? Having read the play, one is left with the definite impression that he was not. And on top of all that, if his most poetical play were received unpoetically – then does one wonder that *Marco Millions* was given to the world?

§ 6

Don Quixote, when he tilted at the windmill, was all unaware of the utter futility of what he did. Don Quixote must have had one of those fierily enthusiastic youthful minds that in spite of all experiences he might be subjected to, will never learn by them, will never be disillusioned by them, and never will grow old. Eugene O'Neill seems to have a mind that is quixotic and hamletian at the same time. He does things, but watches himself doing them, as Hamlet always did, and Don Quixote never did. So he is not quite so blind to the effect of what he does as Don Quixote is. In *Marco Millions* he mounts his Rosinante, takes his lance, rides back a little to get momentum, and then rides at the materialising, unimaginative, modern commercial spirit of the Western world (and more especially America) for all his worth. But if we read the epilogue of the play rightly, he is fully aware of the futility of what he does. He makes a tremendously powerful tilt with all the satiric art at his command, at that spirit, and Marco Polo, the very incarnation of that at which he tilts, watches the play from a front seat in the stalls. The play is a mirror held up before Marco. But Marco does not recognise himself in the mirror. Neither do the other people in the stalls recognise in Marco that which the mirror reflects. They only see him as one a little strange, a little unusual. And in the

effect of the play upon Marco, O'Neill sees all the result of his tilt. What that is, the epilogue tells. The final curtain falls on a scene poignant and exquisitely tender, a profoundly moving scene of beauty holding the hand of grief. Then the lights go up, and we discover Marco in the stalls. 'He rises, conceals a yawn in the palm of his hand, stretches his legs as if they had been cramped by too long an evening, takes his hat from under the seat, and starts to go out slowly with the others in the audience. . . . He looks a bit sleepy, a trifle puzzled, and not a little irritated as his thoughts, in spite of himself, cling for a passing moment to the play just ended. Then, arrived in the lobby, his face begins to clear of all disturbing memories of what has happened on the stage. The noise, the lights of the street, recall him at once to himself. Impatiently he waits for his car, casting a glance here and there at the faces in the groups around him, his eyes impersonally speculative, his bearing stolid with the dignity of one who is sure of his place in the world. His car, a luxurious limousine, draws up at the kerb. He gets in briskly, the door is slammed, the car edges away into the the traffic, and Marco Polo, with a satisfied sigh at the sheer comfort of it all, resumes his life.' That is all.

§ 7

In this play O'Neill gives another form to the idea that is expressed in *The Hairy Ape*. There Yank is an awakened rebel against accepted facts, and that contentment with things that in *Marco Millions* is defined as 'a warm sty for the eaters and sleepers.' Yank, an incarnation of Rodin's 'Le Penseur,' would awaken the eaters and sleepers. But they do not want to be awakened, and Yank soon finds that he is not wanted, that he 'does not belong.' And as Yank is, so O'Neill evidently feels himself to be. More than likely every seer who ever has been in this world has felt the same thing. The certain wise man who delivered the city by his wisdom was forgotten as soon as the city was delivered. Neither do the citizens want the wisdom of the man who warns them of the approach of the enemy before the enemy is actually in sight. In *Marco Millions* O'Neill points out to modern man the enemy approaching. He points out to him, also, all that he is missing. He points out the bars of his prison to him and tells him that he is a prisoner. He points out what liberty means, what glorious things await him, if he will only wake up, break out of his prison, and go forth. And he expects the prisoner (such, evidently, has been his experience of life, as he shows in the above-quoted epilogue) to be irritated a bit, puzzled a little, but certainly not awakened to any recognition of the

existence of the pointed-out bars or the real liberty that lies beyond them. He feels almost hopeless that even the keen, barbed points of his satire will penetrate the prisoner's insensitive skin. Marco Polo (in his own words: 'a man made by Almighty God in His own Image for His greater glory') symbolises that which the wise Kublai says he will have to fly from, 'that which can be neither laughed away nor killed,' that deadly, self-satisfied self-blindness that is spreading over all Western civilisation to-day as ivy does over a bush that it most surely will ultimately kill.

§ 8

Life is a game of deceit. One deceives others as best one can. One deceives oneself as best one can too. And sometimes one man is better at deceiving others than himself. And sometimes one man is better at deceiving himself than deceiving others. In order to live with one's fellow-men in any degree of comfort one must be more or less good at the art of deceit. And there has been, from the most primitive times, an enormous amount of witch-doctory about it all. Moses (as Robert Browning has pointed out) had he merely told the multitude where the spring was, would have been forgotten in no time. But Moses, being wise to the ways of man, dramatically smote the rock. He put on the prophet. So he won a life-prize, became a somebody, and the words

he spoke were a somebody's words. So he was enabled to impose his laws on the people. He made them believe that he had powers that they had not. He made them believe he was what he was not, which is what we all strive, both consciously and subconsciously, to do. And the prizes of life are waiting for us to choose from if we succeed. Not all the prizes of life, but all those that, when we are young and unwise, we believe, count. And Providence in its wisdom makes us unwise, so the prizes will retain their value and lure us illogically on. And in the game, if we can make others believe we are more than we are, we show that our skill is superior to theirs; in some ways at least we are more than they are. But when we reach the stage Christopher Sly reached, and come to believe we are what others believe we are, what we have made others believe we are – then we forget the gods, and are something for the forgotten gods to laugh at. And the gods must laugh, unless they get angry. 'A jester,' says Kublai in *Marco Millions*, 'inspires mirth only so long as his deformity does not revolt one.' Sometimes the forgotten gods get angry. And never was a more god-forgetting age than this one. There are so many and varied way of expression open to a man now that if he fails in one he can quickly turn to another. And thought is always man's last resource. He would never think at all if he could act. 'I hate idleness,' says Marco, 'when there is nothing to occupy your

mind but thinking.' The world is far too busy to-day to waste time musing, thinking, imagining. And the unused imagination becomes feeble, ineffective, inefficient. Man, these days, rarely touches Nature but through his fellow-men. He is walled off so much from God by his fellow-men that he is apt to forget that there is a supernatural – that there is, whatever name we may give it, God. In more primitive times it was different. Then there was only naked Nature between man and the supernatural. He was directly in touch with Nature's cold and heat. If he were ill, the cause of his illness was with the Unknown; also the only possible cure for that illness. He was always in touch with the Unknown, and his imagination had to be always at work about it. It held all he hoped for, and all he feared. Against its inconceivable power he felt always the littleness, the infinite littleness of himself and all his kind. But now it is different. When man is sick these days, he always tries his doctor before his God. He has conquered Nature's storms, and her heat and her cold. What he hopes for or what he most fears his fellow-men can give him. He is dependent upon them, and they have taken to a very large extent the place of the great Unknown. And his very God is but an image of man. Just as he has come to believe he is what he makes others believe he is, so he believes God is just what he has made God. He forgets that God makes him. He is like what a locomotive would

be could it suddenly become conscious and believe itself self-willed – believe that the swelling steam in it is its will to go the way it has to go, and that it only goes the way it wants to go and not the way man makes it go. Man's desire is given to man by the Unknown as man gives its motive-power to the locomotive. Did the locomotive forget that there is man it would be like man forgetting God.

§ 9

Life is a matter of compensation, too, of relativity. Man, to live, must not be over-confident. Neither must he be under-confident. When a man near to Nature is like to faint in fear of its vast awesomeness and his own insignificance, then is the poet of man due to comfort, to encourage, to hope-fill him, to sing him on. He must show what man has been; what he will be. And conversely, when man is so far away and so protected from Nature that it shrinks into insignificance so that against it he grows huge, then the time is ready for the satirist to come. He is the restorer of the so-necessary, lost perspective. He reduces man to the atom he is in the scheme of things. He, as it were, gives him an ear-trumpet so that he can hear the laughter of the forgotten gods. With his art he sets down man just as man has come to see himself. He does not belittle him or exaggerate him in any way. He accepts him at his

own valuation. He draws a life-like, life-size picture of him. Then he proceeds to paint in just as truthfully the hitherto omitted background, and against that background, man, getting into rightful perspective, shrinks, dwindles. To his horror he beholds himself becoming what he never dreamed he ever could become, ludicrous, impossible, absurd. That is, of course, if he recognises the portrait of himself in the first place, which he is often too far gone to do.

§ 10

The satirist's methods differ only according to the background he employs. He must have a background to show man by contrast against as the stars are shown by the darkness of night. Because O'Neill is a poet born, he cannot help making his background for the showing up of Marco a lovely thing. It is so lovely, indeed, that some of its loveliness is reflected down on to and softens out even the ugliness of Marco. So we pity even when we laugh. We sympathise a little with Marco just as we do with Macbeth. He is a victim. He symbolises man as he becomes in the deadening, beauty-paralysing grip of a quick-moving, prize-rich, prosperous, commercial age. When we first meet Marco he is pleasing enough. It is the standardising him to the age's practical ideal that reduces him to what he becomes. He is quite a human boy. He is emotional, romantic. The bump

of wonder is still in him. He loves a maid and tries to write a poem to her and wears her miniature over his heart. There is something in him that stirs in a vague way to beauty. He has not yet lost his soul. But he loses it; his life-education, under the tuition of his commercialised father and uncle, drives it out of him. They teach him that the only god is utility, the only reward material success. Love, romance, sentiment, poetry are not commercial. He will never make good if he wastes his time with them. They must be scrapped. So Marco scraps them. And he is responding most promisingly to his teachers; he is letting go the spirit everywhere for the word, when Kublai, the great Khan of Cathay, sends a message to Tedaldo, just elected Pope, asking him to send him a hundred of his wise men to discuss essentials with his wise men of the East. But Tedaldo has not got a hundred wise men, and just at the time, marvelling at the fledgling Polo, already so representative of the spirit and worldliness of the West, he sends him instead to Kublai. And what does that far-sighted mystic dreamer see in Marco: 'this example, that will illustrate, better than wise words, the flesh and blood product of Christian civilisation'? After long trial very little that he can admire. He sees practical success, certainly, and all the staggering assurance and confidence and blindness to all deeper things that go to the making of such success. Kublai wants to win peace for the world. Marco, with brazen

assurance and utter ignorance of the man he speaks to, and utter blindness to forces beyond the complete, concrete world that his repressed and atrophied imagination never takes him out of, explains to Kublai how that peace can be won. Kublai needs only to conquer the world and make himself so strong that nobody dares to attack him. Then will be peace. And he shows him how with a gunpowder he has perfected he (Kublai) can easily overcome the man who prefers death to surrender. But instead of being impressed, as he should be, Kublai wants to learn more about the man who prefers death to surrender. In the end he sums up Marco. 'He has not even a mortal soul, he has acquisitive instinct. We have given him every opportunity to learn. He has memorised everything and learnt nothing. He has looked at everything and seen nothing. He has lusted for everything and loved nothing.' And Kublai lives to see his beloved granddaughter, Kukachin, symbolical of all that is loveliest in his kingdom, go down before this Marco, as all that is loveliest in Life goes down before what commercialises and materialises it.

§ 11

The play is, as are all true satires, a warning; a warning directed at us all. In one scene Kublai gazes into a crystal, and sees a picture rise up out of the darkness. It is Marco. The whole play is like a

crystal – clean, clear, beautiful. Reading it, a picture gradually forms and becomes definite and clear. It is Marco. But if we read the book aright, we perceive at last that it is no crystal into which we gaze, but a mirror. We have, most of us, been more or less touched by the world-flooding commercial spirit. There are not many of us who, if we have any gift at all for self-seeing, will not find a trace at least of Marco in ourselves. Marco could have married the lovely princess. He had opportunities (such as the present state of civilisation gives to all of us) for seeing and learning. The world, with what was wonderful in it, was open to him (as it is to us). To his hand were romance, beauty. The princess believed in him. She saw him through the colouring, romantic, idealising eyes of youth. To her he was a hero – brave, successful, handsome, masterly. She believed what Kublai doubted, that Marco had an immortal soul. She believed, as youth ever will, where age, wise in experience, doubts. She had seen indications of the possession of that soul. 'Once when he bound up a dog's leg, once when he played with a slave's baby, once when he listened to music over water and she heard him sigh, once when he looked at the sunrise, another time at sunset, another time at the stars, another time at the moon, and each time he said that Nature was wonderful.' Once Marco is just on the verge of seeing in the princess's eyes all that he has missed in life, but,

just at the instant, his uncle drops a money-bag he is counting, and the clink of gold makes Marco himself again. The princess loves him, but he is too busy and practical and unimaginative to see it. Because of what he fails to see, and, therefore, to do, the men of his kind who came after him became slaves. That is the warning note struck in the profoundly satirical prologue of this tremendous, symbolical play.

§ 12

Reading *Marco Millions*, one has a feeling that the play must have been written in a blaze of tropical sunshine. The lavish colouring used in it is surely that left over from *The Fountain*. There is the same flaring, glaring, burning richness. There are gold and green and crimson and blue and yellow, all vivid and fresh and separate like the plumage of a giant tropic bird. There is no blending, no shading, no softening. It is a rich, clean, clear-cut play, without greyness, without shadows. It is hard and bright and scintillating like a precious stone. And its characterisation partakes of the common richness. There are all sorts of picturesquely-clad people. And the play is one of contrasts. There are scenes in it tremendously humorous and scenes just as tremendously poignant, but they pass and repass like differently-directioned layers of clouds in the sky, like fishes in the sea. They contrast always, but never

touch, never blend. One gets sound and silence, blackest darkness, intensest light. And all the time the action moves like grand opera music. Now its movement is quick, now slow. Now it has the clash of multitudinous instruments of brass, and now the thin, poignant wailing of violins. It touches great heights and great depths. And its rising and falling has the suddenness of the rising and falling of equatorial days and nights. The sudden transition from the tensely pathetic emotional note of the last scene to the everyday practicalism of the epilogue is typical of the whole play. There is great poetic power in the play, and imaginative artistic greatness.

[redacted]

# STRANGE INTERLUDE

[redacted]

# STRANGE INTERLUDE

## § 1

'PEOPLE do not do these things,' cries Assessor Brack, when he hears that Hedda Gabler has shot herself. That is what quite a number of people will cry out when they have finished reading Eugene O'Neill's play, *Strange Interlude*. But it will be a purely protective, defensive, possibly fearful cry, and its object will be to ward off what those people do not want to see, to hide from themselves, – Truth. 'How we poor monkeys hide from ourselves behind the sounds called words!' says Nina in this play. And later on, 'But, stop and think, you're just the one who couldn't know what I mean. With you the lies have become the only truthful things!' That is the way most of us go. We humans are really the loneliest things in existence because we are the only things gifted with what at times gives us terrifying glimpses of how lonely we are. We are like beings eternally on the edge of awful bottomless depths. If we are blind to those depths we can be confident, sure, brave, joyous. We can dance and run and leap and sing. But give us a first glimpse of those awful depths, and all our confidence, sureness, courage,

joyousness dies. We instinctively close our eyes. We try to believe the depths are not there. Later, driven by the curiosity-urge, we look again, and then again, and ultimately our confidence returns, and a new ability. But the process is not one of days or years. It is one of generations and ages. The light of reason and imagination is a mighty gift, but like all mighty gifts it must be mightily paid for. It brings to man mental joys all unknown to the lower animals, but it brings to him also what is unknown to the lower animals, concomitant mental sufferings and pains. The birds and insects and animals mimic as best they can their surroundings to keep themselves concealed. They have to to live, but they are not conscious of what they do. They act purely instinctively. We do what they do instinctively too. But if our minds are sufficiently developed we watch what we are doing. We see ourselves concealing ourselves, and know, as the lower animals cannot, how much alone, what disconnected entities drifting in endless and timeless space, we really are. But even when we see, we must go on. We must keep ourselves concealed from our fellow-men if we are to live with them. We must keep out of sight any character weaknesses we possess, and we must make the best show of strength we possibly can. We must assume and wear all sorts of virtues that are not naturally ours at all. If we are cowardly, we must show how brave we can be to hide our cowardice. If we are

liars born, we must show how, even when it is to our own disadvantage, we tell the truth. If we are shy and nervous, we adopt airs of bravado. We whistle, laugh, talk loudly. We try to pass ourselves off as natural parts of our surroundings. We try to appear as normal men. We try to successfully deceive just as do the birds and the insects and the animals. And we can always play parts better if we can forget that we are actors, if we can close our eyes upon ourselves, and believe ourselves the parts we play. If we can do this, we will be with those people who, on reading a play like *Strange Interlude*, cry out: 'This is not true!' 'People do not do these things!' For such a play will be disturbing, depth-lighting. We want to believe we are not like those always part-playing people in the play. We want to believe that other people are not like them either. We want to be able to keep on believing. But if we have developed so far that we cannot so believe; if we must watch and cannot close our eyes to ourselves; if we belong to the lonely self-watchers and knowers, then a play like this one will come to us as a great warming, comforting, welcome guiding light. It will show us that there are many more like we are; that we are not unique, bizarre, abnormal; that there are others, many of them, just as weak and cowardly and uncertain and lustful and jealous and self-centred and rebellious and bewildered as we are; that we are not so much alone as we have horribly feared.

§ 2

People do do what Hedda Gabler did. And people do do what Nina and Marsden and Darrell and Sam and Sam's mother and Nina's father do. *Strange Interlude* is simply a collection of significant chapters in a story of the relations between one quite normal, highly-strung, sensitive, educated, imaginative, intellectual woman and a number of equally normal, a little above the average, modern men. Of course people like those written of above, the clingers-to, and strenuous fighters on behalf of what they have been taught is or should be, will deny that these people in the play are normal. The truth-seeker accepted by these people will never be one who really seeks truth, but one who seeks for confirmation of what is traditionally and conventionally accepted as being true. And they will ask, Would a normal woman be as feelingless at her father's death as Nina is? Would a normal woman give herself to numerous men for reasons like Nina's, or for any other reason? Would a normal woman deliberately undergo an operation to have taken away her unborn babe? They will deny, too, that normal men speak so many more lies than truth as do all the men in the play, and are so mean and little and envious and self-centred. They will deny, too, that normal people have such feelings as all the characters in the play show they have, and think such thoughts. But what is

the standard by which these people measure normality? Is everything, for instance, that appears normal, normal? Then let us analyse appearance as it applies to ourselves. Let us look under our apparent selves. Then can any one of us say he or she is as he or she appears to be to other people, or at least as he or she tries hard to appear to other people? And if appearances do not reveal us, why believe that they reveal other people? The characters in *Strange Interlude* do not appear normal because we see them abnormally. If we saw those 'normal' people whom we meet and have dealings with every day, as we see the characters in the play, with their minds exposed and their every-day, world-facing masks off, see them as their doctors and lawyers and priests see them, see them as they alone see themselves, would they appear normal? Do women who give themselves to men always appear abnormal women? When a woman undergoes an operation for abortion, does everybody know it? And people with thoughts and feelings like those secret ones of the characters in the play, would they necessarily appear abnormal, even if they lived in the same house as we did, and we saw and spoke with them every day? Of course people should not have such thoughts and feelings. They are against what has been instilled into us through generations as rightful thoughts and feelings. But are they really uncommon or unnatural thoughts and feelings? A man's wealthy relative dies, and the man's first feeling

will be one of secret elation, and his first thoughts will be connected with what he is likely to get out of the deceased man's estates. His second feeling will be one of self-disgust and fear, and his second thought will be, 'What a heartless and unnatural brute I must be to be feeling such feelings and thinking such thoughts.' Then he will proceed to make himself feel and think as he should, or at least as his conscience, that wholly artificial standard of rightful conduct, that has been handed down to him by his ancestors, and which he fears to doubt or question, tells him he should. This conscience, he has been told, and believes, is the eye of his god that can see all that he does, and know all that he feels and thinks. He does not know that it is a wholly man-invented thing to keep him disciplined and in subjection. In fear of it he will try to thrust away, then, his first feelings and thoughts. He will try to make himself what he believes is normal. And whether he succeeds or fails, all the time his outward appearance will give no indication or very little of the behaviour of the inward man. His world-facing mask will still be on. He will still be playing his part. He will be the sincere, great-hearted, sympathetic man. He will be the cynic. He will weep or play the part of the emotion-disciplined stoic. He will ape his ideal man, whatever shape that ideal man may take, to the very best of his ability. And to his wife, his mother, his children, his friends he will be, to all appearance,

just like most of us strive to be – a perfectly normal man.

§ 3

*Strange Interlude* is a magnificent art-reproduction of selected significant phases of a few of the myriad strange interludes called human lives that connect what is before birth with what comes after death. Its incidents, not impossible, not even improbable in these amazing times, might be foreign to our individual experiences, but the mental interplay occasioned by these incidents, or that occasion these incidents, is based on human nature, and is only foreign and untruthful to people whose minds are not at a sufficiently advanced state of development to look into themselves and see what is going on there. How many of us, gifted so to look and see, can throw stones at Nina or Marsden or Darrell or Sam's mother or the poor old professor? All these people are self-lovers; all are self-centred. They are all more important to themselves than to any other people in the world. They all feel their own aches and pains more than, say, the death of the highest being in the land. And they all at times hate themselves for being what they are and fight strenuously against themselves. But they have got to admit that they are, whatever they are, just what they are. Are we not all the same? Nina cries out: 'There's no use trying to think for others. One human being cannot

think for another. It's impossible.' Let us, goaded on by passion and the suffering of thwarted passion, as Nina is, get down about the roots of natural things, and we must find this is true. The feelings of these characters that they are ashamed of, and try with all their might to repress, and convince themselves are not, are only common human feelings, and their thoughts, their secret, never-told, confusing, self-accusing, rebellious, defiant, anguished, always baffling and thwarted thoughts, are only common human thoughts too. How many of us getting suffering- or desire-lit glimpses of the utter littleness of ourselves against the vast, inevitable, inexorableness of cosmic purpose, do not at some time or other cry out in fear and anger as do these people? These people are only what all real human beings are, desire-driven, dream-lured, emotion- or mind-directed rebels against the Fate that would use man as it uses all the rest of natural things. 'You who make us what we are, and do what we do,' they seem to cry, 'tell us what we are, and what it is we do!' And ever, as it is in life, O'Neill shows the mind people living and suffering for the instinctive people, the seeing people living for the blind, the god in man dying that the brute in man might be preserved to carry on the race. Marsden and Nina and Darrell, and even Sam's mother, are all vastly superior mentally to Sam, but they all live for Sam's happiness. They are all his slaves. So the leaders of men are always the best servants of man.

§ 4

Life in all its forms is always first of all defensive. The first essential is to keep life complete and immune. But the life-urge itself is always for expression. The first instinct is to keep life in us; the second to do something with life. Man's first instinct then is to wear his mask of pretence; to hide himself behind assumed appearance. But his secondary instinct is to take his mask off; to reveal himself. This is part of the very definite urge that is in all natural things towards an ultimate perfect understanding. It is this urge that is the root-motive of all the arts. Man wants to show what he is, to be understood. And he wants to understand. His instinct urges him to seek others like himself. But his first instinct, to keep life in him at all costs, makes him fearful and distrustful. He wants to put down his sword and his shield, but he fears to. He wants to tell the truth, and to listen to the truth, but again he fears to. There is an instinct in all men to confess and to listen to confession. But however strong the first instinct may be, it is more often than not opposed by something stronger than itself, the obvious disadvantage that must accrue from such confession. If I confess all my weaknesses to you, and you do not confess all your weaknesses to me, I am putting myself to disadvantage with you. I throw away my sword and shield; can I trust you to do the same? I dare not. It is the

same with you. We want to come together, but fear keeps us apart. It is when we have reached this stage that the artist is due. He is man's go-between and God's interpreter. He, with his art-gift, reveals himself. I see how like I am to the revelation, and you see how like you are to it too. Therefore we must be alike. We come together. The dramatic artist, for instance, comes, creates his character, reveals him by opposing him to other characters and tasks, and we see our own weaknesses, ambitions, desires, fears, hopes, dreams revealed – all that I feared to reveal to you, and all that you feared to reveal to me. If you had pointed to such weaknesses in me as are here revealed, I would have seen you penetrating my defences. I would have been defensively angry. If I had pointed to such weaknesses in you, you would have been alarmed and angry too. Yet the dramatic artist reveals our lusts, our greed, our petty meannesses, our jealousies, our mind-agonies, our fears – all the selves we hide from each other and often from ourselves. We see them, and if we are not too deeply hidden from ourselves, recognise the truth of the work, and are not angry. We are sympathetically interested. We can look upon such truth because the general applicableness of it, and the obvious fictitiousness of the story, serve as a protection to our mental sight. And we must have this protection. The artist must have his art.

## § 5

Shakespeare, endowed with the mightiest mind possibly that ever was, looked into himself, and all about himself, and set down what he saw. He gave the world his life-experience, and what he gave the world is a mirror in which the world sees mirrored itself. But Shakespeare did not simply say: 'I saw this' or 'I saw that,' or 'I felt thus,' or 'I thought this' or 'I thought that.' Truth is acclaimed the most beautiful of all things, but man has a sense of shame and he cannot gaze on even Truth in the nude. She must be dressed. When men go to look upon the sun, they take coloured glass to look through. And the artist must not give the world Truth, as truth, or in his own person. He must provide mental eye-protection. Shakespeare drew men and women he saw, and things he saw. He drew himself. He set down his feelings and thoughts, but always indirectly. To tell man the truth, he used the fictional lie. He, as it were, projected on to a screen a disguised being, compounded of all his life-experiences, and showed the world the screen. So hiding himself, he revealed himself. Using fiction as a mental eye-protection, he told the truth as it had probably never been told before. In his own, different way, Ibsen did the same. And in his own, again different way, O'Neill is doing the same. All great artists in their own different ways do the same. The motive is the same, too, and

the aim. We can throw the light of our reason on these motives and aims and study them for a little way. But they are like pillars rising out of what, to our farthest seeing, is a bottomless sea. They are ultimately with eternity and infinity. We can look down a little way through the darkening water, but that is all. But we can study the parts of them that connect the motive and the aim, the cause and the effect, the seen and the unseen. We can study the structure of the screens employed, and the methods of self-projection, and the results achieved as far as they go within our imagination-illuminated world.

§ 6

The dramatist, like any other form of artist, has to face the limitation of his art-medium. The instinct that urges on the painter would have him reproduce all the visible world. But because of his own, and his art limitations, he can only select a few impressive and significant phases of it, and concentrate all his art-powers on the truthful reproduction of these phases. He must set down of these phases the essential truth that is in them, visible to him, and visible to us when he points it out to us. And to achieve his end of concentrating our attention on this essential, he can do what he likes with minor details. He can omit, exaggerate, insert, transpose. But the truth he takes out from the special phase of nature

he deals with, must stand definite and simply clear. And it must be what is independent of time or place. The universal must be picked out from the particular and set down with all minor details in the picture, turning the perceiving eye towards what is universally true in the picture. It is exactly the same with the musician, the thinker. The latter must concentrate all attention on the universally applicable thought-truth. It is the same with the dramatist. He would reproduce in his art-work all mankind, but again, because of his art-limitation, he must pick out the universal from the particular. He must select a few representative men to represent all men. He must pick out from the one what is in all, and concentrate with all his art-powers our attention on this universal phase. He, too, can do what he will with his minor details, but the essential part of his work must be independent of time and place, and utterly true. He must convert the individuals he employs as models into types. He must thus truthfully reproduce types of human beings or typical groups of human beings. He can dress his people as he will, set them to live where and when he will. All the details, then, are extraneous and, except in their directive powers, unimportant. The essential truth of the work must be independent of all these things. The character must represent and be true to human nature as it was thousands of years ago, as it will be thousands of years hence, and as it is to-day.

§ 7

It was in his power of selecting and setting down this essential truth of human nature that Shakespeare was so supreme. It was in the same way that Ibsen was great. And now *Strange Interlude* comes to definitely prove that Eugene O'Neill too possesses this rarest of gifts. Many fictional artists set out to create characters, new, original, uncommon, individual. They more often than not draw from imagination and not from experience. They copy pictures instead of drawing from life. Or they draw characters that represent particular results of particular social conditions or circumstances or ideas. Such characters are neither timeless or placeless. They, according to the cleverness with which they are drawn, amuse, interest, win our sympathy, stimulate our minds. But when the particular social conditions or circumstances have passed away, these characters will pass away too. They are at best expressions, not of the depths whence human nature has its ultimate being, but of the surface of human nature that reflects and responds to passing pressures, as the surface of the deep sea reflects the sky and the clouds, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and is ruffled by passing winds. The great fictional characters are born of their author's experiences. On the surface they might be particularised individuals, or they might not be. It is not their merely time-

and place-dressed and individualised surface selves that count. It is the human nature of the deep that wells up in them and is but emphasised by those surface selves. They must have qualities common, not to a few isolated individuals, not to idealised dream heroes, but to many or all men. They must represent what always was in man, what always will be in man, what is in man. Shakespeare's mighty genius is revealed more in his power to select and register such universal human types than in anything else. With all his unrivalled word-power and richness of imaginative expression power, no writer has ever been so ruthless as he was in his omission of unessential and insignificant surface detail. That is why his characters stand so firm-footed, compact, complete. We have not got to pause and remove from them what was dependent on the age in which they are set to live and their social state. Other fiction writers give us whole pages descriptive of their characters. We know the colour of their hair and eyes, how they were featured, how they were dressed, their bodily peculiarities, their features, their mannerisms, but a perfectly accurate description of all these things counts for nothing unless it is merely indicative and suggestive of what is below. The vast majority of these painstakingly drawn characters do not last. The essential truth is not in them. So they are merely dolls, puppets, dummies, mouthpieces. Shakespeare just writes: Enter Iago, or enter Macbeth, or enter

Hamlet, or enter Ophelia, or enter Justice Shallow. That is all the introduction we get to them. We do not know the colour of their hair or eyes, how they are clothed, how they are featured. But we remember them. We might not remember what they say. But they never die, because an essential truth of humanity is registered in each one of them, and we recognise that truth, if we have minds developed enough to do so, because the truth in them we see in our own experience of life.

§ 8

Quite a number of great fiction artists have given representative human types to the world. These types might be divided into two classes – objective and subjective – what we might justly call major and minor types. Dickens, for instance, gave the world a few minor types – Micawber and Uriah Heep, for instance. Micawbers and Uriah Heeps come within all our experiences, and belong, as types, to no particular time or place. Dickens sets them to live in London in his own time, but these surface details do not matter; the types are universal. Turgenev gave the world Bazarov, a major type. Goncharov gave it Oblomov, a major type too. Goethe gave the world Faust, also a major type. All intellectual men have got more or less of Bazarov and Oblomov and Faust in them, and must recognise the essential truth of them. Then Cervantes gave

the world Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the one a major, the other a minor type. But Shakespeare gave the world Hamlet and Macbeth, essentially major types, and a whole little world of minor types – Justice Shallow, and Bottom, and Pistol, and Malvolio, and Christopher Sly, and ever so many more. There is nothing new or uncommon about any of these characters. All men of highly developed intellectuality must find themselves in Hamlet and Macbeth, and all men will see Shallows and Pistols and Bottoms and Malvolios and Christopher Slys, when they look about them and into themselves. Then Shakespeare gave to the world a whole gallery of types that come between the major and minor types – Iago the cynic, with his catlike love of inflicting pain, and Falstaff the *bon vivant*, with his doglike love of fun, and Othello the jealous, and Mercutio the gallant, and Hotspur the impetuous; and the womanly types – Ophelia the maidenly, and Desdemona the romantic, and Cleopatra, the mortal woman with immortal longings. Have we not at some time or other come upon originals of these characters and recognised them? And that in spite of the fact that we have no knowledge, or very little, regarding their external characteristics. Newton saw the significance of the falling apple and showed us what we all now plainly see. Darwin did the same for evolution. He only pointed out what for ages and ages had been before man's eyes. Shakespeare's

gift was like to theirs. He saw and pointed out what has always been before man's eyes too, what we all now plainly enough see.

§ 9

That is what all great artists and only great artists do. They point out the truth that is always before all our eyes. It is only their methods that differ. Eugene O'Neill, to point out a truth of human nature, a dateless and placeless truth, uses in *Strange Interlude* a method that differs entirely from any Shakespeare ever used. In 'Yank' in *The Hairy Ape*, he has used to some extent the Shakespearean method. That is, the attention of the audience is concentrated on a type character. 'Yank' is bizarre, unique, grotesque, but as the thinker in advance of his time and class, he is a true representative type. But 'Yank' does not stand out clear and distinct as a Shakespearean type-character. He is like some of the works of Rodin, those strange, powerful things that still have the earth whence they came clinging to them. He is at least as much particular as universal. Then we see in *The Great God Brown* O'Neill's method changing as his art power grows. He is there edging more and more away from the type character towards the type group. And in *Strange Interlude* we see a further, possibly final result of this development. In this play the characters are not

type characters at all. There is a complete reversion to the individual and particular. They are merely distinctly drawn men and women who are to a great extent, externally at any rate, results of the time they live in, the place they live in, and the social conditions they live under. But the author's art concentration is not upon them individually, but on the whole group of them. As that group they very clearly mirror the mental interplay of men and women towards themselves and each other. It is this mental interplay that is timeless and placeless, and it is in the clear setting down of this wherein lies the greatness of the play. Strip these characters of their clothes, and redress them as people dressed in the time of Socrates. Let them live in ancient Athens or some undreamed-of city of the far future; and what does it matter? The artist has gone below the changing surface into the changeless, all-basing depths of human nature for the subject of his work. The audience who listen to the characters, whatever time or place they belong to, will recognise in these characters, in their despairing, hoping, always-seeking and never-finding thought-gropings, their self-accusing and self-excusing, their self-torturing and self-soothing, their passion-inspired, self-truth-telling and fear-inspired self-lying, and above all in the concealing words they ever use to one another – themselves.

§ 10

O'Neill's method in this play is entirely new and original. In *The Great God Brown* we have seen him throw aside the old-fashioned soliloquy and, with the boldness of genius, employ masks with startling effect. In this new play he drops the masks and returns to the soliloquy, but only to use it as it has never been used before. And though at first sight it might seem a retrograde step technically, it is really a great step forward, that must, still keeping in the direction of an approximation to reality, greatly increase the expressive powers of dramatic art. For O'Neill does not return to the old unrealistic soliloquy. The Hamlet-man, the self-watching introspective, does not put his resulting thoughts into word-arrangements such as are in Hamlet's soliloquies. He, least of all people, does not wait until he is alone to start his thinking, as Hamlet, in conformity with the art-limitation of the art-form Shakespeare used, had to. But all people's secret thoughts are in the form O'Neill's characters use in the form of soliloquy he has invented. These thoughts are broken, irrelevant, disconnected, confused, unfinished, jerky, associative, self-explanatory, self-excusing, self-condoning, and so on. In the only two critiques I read of this play, both in London papers, the reviewers took up most of their space refuting the Americans who had claimed that O'Neill

was being original in method in this play. They searched and quoted literary history, but in the end only proved what was obvious, and what nobody was disputing, that the soliloquy had been used in various ways before. They did not prove, though, that it had ever been used before as O'Neill uses it here. In all older plays, even in Shakespeare's, the soliloquy is given a place of only secondary importance. But here it is given a place of primary importance. Those older plays are plays of action and dialogue, with soliloquy in them. This is a play of soliloquy, with action and dialogue in it. In older plays the soliloquy was used sometimes to get the author out of a difficulty, and more often to explain the actions of the characters in the play. But in this play the actions are explanatory of the soliloquy. Hamlet's soliloquies, for instance, simply take the place of the old chorus. They explain and account for all Hamlet's acts. It is the same with Macbeth. They are in most cases philosophical or psychological discourses that serve as guides and interpreters of the picture. The soliloquies of O'Neill's characters are quite different. They are not philosophical or psychological discourses on the picture. They are the picture. The guides and interpreters of the picture are the actions of the characters and the words they speak to each other. Hamlet's action and inaction in the play are the results of his thoughts. He is a representation of the effect upon external circumstances

of a particular type of mind. But all the characters in *Strange Interlude*, as a group, represent the effect of external circumstances upon minds of typical, normal human beings. Leaving out of account the emotional appeal of the respective stories themselves, Hamlet can only appeal to and be really appreciated and understood by the Hamlet type of man. He alone can bring to the play what is mirrored by the play. But all normally-minded, intelligent people, who do look sometimes below the surface, will have that to bring to *Strange Interlude* which is mirrored there. This will probably account for the startling success of the play when it was produced in New York during the spring and summer of this year.

§ 11

It seems a far cry from Eugene O'Neill to William Blake. But one cannot help feeling that there must be somewhere, at the back of the vast difference between the works of the clear-sighted, scientific seer and the exalted, passion-tormented visionary, some similarity. At least I know that all the time I was reading *Strange Interlude* I was thinking of Blake's utterly dissimilar works. Possibly that similarity is only their common, instinctive, quite sub-conscious purpose. They are both marvellously fashioned instruments in the employment of the same inconceivably vast truth-revealing hand. But

the similarity, I feel all the time, is not so far away in the unseen as that common hand. They are both introspectives, and both ruthless setters-down of what they see. But they see differently. O'Neill is a scientific introspective, Blake an emotional introspective. Through their own clear-seeing minds they look with intense, searching interest into the universal mind of which they are parts. But their resultant works are different because they see the same thing differently. To O'Neill, the universal mind is a still, bottomless pool with everything floating in it clear-cut and distinct. It is all clear lines and clear colours. There is no blurring, no distortion, no hiding, magnifying and belittling shadows. His own emotions are all the time under control, disciplined. Whilst he watches he can be scientifically calm, detached. But Blake cannot be calm, detached. His emotions are never disciplined, rarely under control. So when he looks into the same universal mind that O'Neill looks into, he can only see through a surface ruffled by anger, pity, elation. So what he sees is distorted, grotesque, blurred. The lines are never straight, the colours never clear and separate and distinct. O'Neill the scientist, with all his emotional being disciplined into the one great truth-urge, sees clearly and accurately, and puts down what is. Blake, the saint, with all his emotional being, undisciplined and only vaguely directive, feels what should be, and what he sees,

compared with his glowing, imaginative pictures of what should be, is, for him, ugly, vicious, unbeautiful. O'Neill is rebellious against God for making man what he is. Blake is angry with man for being what he is. Showing man's mind-struggles between what he feels and what he believes he should feel, and what he thinks and what he believes he should think, Blake is always on the side of what should be felt and thought. O'Neill is just as ruthlessly on the side of what is. Blake, the fanatic repressionist, is a rebel against what is animal in man. O'Neill, the scientific expressionist, is a rebel against the Fate that keeps man from being a god. Their similarity seems to be in the common subject, the human mind, and their ultimate common direction. They both reveal that mind raw, and in the nude. Blake shows it in terms of its effect upon man's physical being. He, as it were, removes the outer skin, and shows the mind's terrors and tortures and elation and anguish in terms of heaving, straining, contorted, bruised and bleeding, flayed human flesh. O'Neill goes even deeper. He removes both the skin and the flesh. He shows you the mind in all its terrors and tortures and elation and anguish, by removing all that is between your eyes and the mind itself. Blake, the instinctive repressionist, sees man's suffering as due to his own disregard of God's will. O'Neill, the instinctive expressionist, sees it as due to disregard of man's own will. Blake would lead man against man on

God's behalf, but O'Neill would lead man against God on man's behalf. He is all for man, the unconsulted slave of all that is beyond, all that has been, and all that will be. And he is just as passionately a religious man as is William Blake.

§ 12

*Strange Interlude* is a tremendous play. From those rich, strong, beauty-promising fledgling-flights – Eugene O'Neill's early one-act plays – to *Strange Interlude* is a long, ever-mounting way. Never since Ibsen went has any dramatist put so much of what is ever essential to great drama into any play as there is in this. There are clearly drawn characters, and just as clearly set down universal truth. There are tragedy and comedy, tears and laughter, and deep, fierce passion, and self-discipline, and irony and biting satire. There are profound insight into human nature and deep-rooted sincerity and sympathy. There are utter ruthlessness and gentleness and compassion. There is the dainty beauty of the tiny, exquisitely delicately-coloured and perfumed flower, and there is the strong, hard, hoary, magnificent beauty of the weather- and age-defying giant forest tree. And always there is truth. The whole play is a marvellous art-reproduction of life, life as lived by man. 'Life,' says Chu-yin in *Marco Millions*, 'is perhaps most wisely regarded as a bad dream between

two awakenings, and every day is a life lived in miniature.' And Marsden, in *Strange Interlude*, when he and Nina are neither any longer young, says: 'After all, dear Nina, there is something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and fantastic, the sort of thing that isn't done in our afternoons. So let you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace.' And Nina answers (with a strange smile), 'Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electric display of God the Father!'

## § 13

How far Eugene O'Neill will yet go, who can say? He is quite a young man still, and already he stands, in the opinion of this writer, stamped by this play, if by no other, as easily the first dramatist of the present age.

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